

MICROGEOGRAPHIES:  
GALICIAN NARRATIVES OF PLACE (2004–2012)

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## ABSTRACT

NEIL D. ANDERSON: *Microgeographies: Galician Narratives of Place (2004–2012)*  
(Under the direction of Samuel Amago)

This dissertation analyzes representations of place in works of Galician-language narrative fiction published between 2004 and 2012: *A intervención* by Teresa Moure, *Todo é silencio* by Manuel Rivas, *Ser ou non* by Xurxo Borrazás, *Dime algo sucio* and *Historias de Oregón* by Diego Ameixeiras, and *En vías de extinción* by María Reimóndez. This study begins from the hypothesis that places, far from being unitary or stable entities, are constituted through discourses and practices and can best be analyzed as sites of articulation, spaces of negotiation, and unfolding sets of relations (Lepofsky, following Amin and Thrift; Massey, Allen et al.). It argues that narrative fiction often works against homogenizing discourses of place by creating *microgeographies*, or aestheticized representations of the multiple ways in which places are lived, experienced, and contested. By analyzing these *microgeographies*, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of how topics such as local knowledge, the rural-urban divide, community, and home are being imagined in contemporary Galician cultural production. This emphasis on small-scale geographies serves as point of entry into a larger discussion of the relationship between the local and the global, between agency and structure. In analyzing narrative representations of relatively small spaces—from the body itself, to a building, a garden, a village, an urban neighborhood—this dissertation describes some of the ways in which the meaning of places derives from the

contact (and conflict) between the individual and the forces that order social life, from the family to local politics, from linguistic hegemony to global capitalism.

*to Louise and Karl, my place in the world*

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## PREFACE

“O universal é o local sem paredes.” ~Miguel Torga

In 1994, I moved to Maine, the birthplace of the woman I would later marry. As a newcomer to the state, I laughed with some bitterness at the joke about an old Maine farmer who gives directions to an out-of-stater: The farmer begins, “You take a left where Hubbard’s barn used to be...”. One interpretation of how this joke functions is that it makes fun of the farmer, painting him as a rube so immersed in his own provincial reality that he is unable to see his home territory in schematic, objective terms, and is therefore unable to make it legible to an outsider. But, as anyone who has been to Maine knows, the joke is really on the outsider, whose lack of local knowledge means that no matter how well-oriented they may be or how easily they reach their destination, they still don’t really “know” where they are.

What is striking to me about the joke is how concisely it conveys the subjectivity of spatial experience. The question is not whose experience is more authentic, but rather, what are the structuring elements that contribute to an individual’s experience of place. In the case of the newcomer, the experience of Maine may be subtended by boosterish discourses of “Vacationland” or by ideas of quaintness or desolation, and voiced-over by a GPS that orders “Turn left in 200 yards”. In the case of the farmer, perhaps the landscape is tinted by memories of seasons come and gone, or overwritten by a dream of retiring to Florida. Even the built environment, there for all to see, is rich in signifiers that can be parsed with different

grammars: a four-lane road can *mean*, simultaneously, an easier commute, a construction contract, the loss of a shade tree.

In August of 2002, I traveled from Maine to Santiago de Compostela to begin a year of study abroad, a new kind of outsider experience. Very early in my stay, I asked a passerby if it was possible to walk from the university's south campus to the north campus. "Claro, hijo. Santiago se anda todo andando." Over the course of that year, my wife and I learned the truth of that for ourselves, endlessly walking the streets of the old city, sometimes venturing farther afield into outlying commercial, industrial, and agricultural areas. Without access to a car, our experience of Santiago, of Galicia, of Spain, was, in large measure, really the experience of a few square kilometers, a territory that, step by step, we tried to take in. I, for one, believed that by limiting my geographic range, I would ultimately gain a deeper, more authentic experience of my surroundings that had little to do with the trappings of the touristic phenomenon that is the apostolic city. And on some level, by walking the city stone by stone—to buy groceries, go to class, or to hit our favorite bars and caf  s—we did start to feel that we knew the place. On another level, though, as an outsider I became acutely aware that a sense of place depends on more than physical presence and routine. It depends also on one's embeddedness in the social fabric, on one's knowledge of the land, of its history, its people, its language. It seems especially clear in retrospect that even though I strove to make the most of my time in Compostela by staying local, I found that physically being there—something easy enough to achieve—was actually a rather shallow experience, but one that, owing to factors ranging from the relatively short period of my stay to my own introverted personality, I was at pains to deepen.



In many ways, this dissertation is the result of that brief time in Compostela—although that city is not often mentioned in the pages that follow—and my time in Maine. Both sojourns caused me to reflect on how people’s experiences of place are mediated by knowledge, discourses, power structures, and ideologies that are difficult to observe and even harder to understand. In this project, I have attempted to bring this perspective to the study of narrative fiction, undertaking a disciplinary and linguistic itinerancy in search of a space of intersection where geography and letters inform one another. Whatever might be good and useful in this dissertation belongs to all my fellow travelers, those who have shared with me their conviction that by learning languages, engaging with unfamiliar theoretical corpora, and by undertaking close readings of literature and other cultural products, we stand to learn something not only about the texts, but also about the world beyond the text, something about others, and something about ourselves. *Porque o mundo tamén se anda lendo e escribindo.*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ti dis: Galiza é ben pequena. Eu digo: máis breve é esta colina que miramos na oquidade sombría da noite lunar propagándonos un tacto de estrelas remotas que comoven a carne mentres pairan sonoras as harpas de outubro sobre o campo vacío.

Ti dis: Galiza é ben pequena. Eu digo: menor é o voo dos páxaros que levan a fronteira nostálgica das alas a un pórtico sen nome as tardes en que a bruma espárese o seu imperio e só hai aves un instante.

Ti dis: Galiza é ben pequena. Eu digo: mais breve é a túa boca, recanto onde pracer da carne se reduce a espazos diminutos e enleva o sangue ás árbores e á tarde e fai celeste un eco tan sutil que a noite para nós pode ser nada, nada, nada.

Manuel Forcadela (“Ti dis” 194).

This dissertation explores the experience of place in recent Galician fiction and departs from the hypothesis that places, far from being unitary, stable entities, are constituted through discourses and practices and can best be analyzed as sites of articulation, spaces of negotiation, and unfolding sets of relations (Lepofsky 2–3, following Amin and Thrift; Massey, Allen et al.). The central methodological question underlying this project is that of how to apply geographical thinking to cultural products such as narrative fiction. Following Enric Bou, I propose cultural geography as a source of reading strategies that literary scholars can employ “to explore how worlds, places, landscapes, meanings, and human experiences are socially constructed and help constitute specific cultural contexts” (Adams, et al., qtd. in Bou 51). Specifically, I propose a method based on the interpretation of *microgeographies*, which I define as aestheticized representations of the highly individual

ways in which places are lived, experienced, and contested. By analyzing these *microgeographies*, I seek to contribute to the understanding of how topics such as local knowledge, the rural-urban divide, community, and home are being imagined in contemporary Galician cultural production, while also showing how literary interpretation informed by geography can play a role in explicating interactions between structure and agency and in identifying sites of resistance in everyday life.

This introduction is divided into four sections: In the first, I offer a brief introduction to the concepts of space and place in contemporary social theory. In the second, I examine the relationship between literature, geography, and cultural studies and outline the general theoretical framework I have adopted in this dissertation. In the third, I introduce the concept of *microgeographies* as a reading strategy. In the last section I outline the arguments that I will take up in the remainder of this dissertation.

### **Space and Place: A First Approach**

What do we mean when we refer to *space* and *place*? How has the “spatial turn” in social theory questioned and refined long-held definitions and connotations of spatial terminology? Tim Oakes and Patricia Lynn Price point out that the terms *space* and *place* are often conflated in common discourse yet, within specific discourses, such as that of cultural geography, they are distinct: space is more abstract, place more concrete, place is “space infused with meaning” (254). But how is it so infused? The idea that space is a container that we fill, thereby creating “localities” has been problematized, and place is now often regarded as “a fluid nexus of lived social relations on a variety of scales, from abstract to concrete; and from global to the local” (254). Place is, therefore, the result of people’s “embodied engagement with our surroundings [...] place-making and meaning-making [are] conjoined

activities” (254; see also Cresswell 37); it is an inherently relational concept, connected to questions of how we think about and experience the world.

Beginning in the 1970s, humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph elaborate an approach to place that takes as its object of study the subjective experience of place and place as an essential part of human nature—a phenomenological approach to place. According to Tim Cresswell, scholarship within this framework is motivated by the concern that “[s]patial science simply missed out too much of the richness of human experience [...] and despite the lip service paid to ‘place’ in definitions of geography no-one was really bothering to figure out what it was. It could not be measured or mapped and laws could not be deduced about or from it” (21). Cresswell continues, “At heart this phenomenological enterprise involved the acknowledgment that to be human is to be ‘in place.’ To the humanist ontological priority was given to the human immersion in place rather than the abstractions of geometric space” (23). For Cresswell, while “geographical engagement with phenomenological enquiry rescued the notion of place from oblivion” it also constructed “a notion of place which some see as essentialist and exclusionary, based on notions of rooted authenticity that are increasingly unsustainable in the (post)modern world” (26).

The sub-field of radical human geography seeks to remedy the shortcomings of the phenomenological approach by re-inserting political and social awareness into the study of place. French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, an early elaborator of the idea of space as a social product, articulates in *La production de l'espace* (1974) (Published in English as *The Production of Space* in 1991) his view that “(social) space is a (social) product” (26). Lefebvre argues that “social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an

aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents, and that it is irreducible to a 'form' imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon physical materiality" (27). He posits an analytical framework in which three facets of social space coexist: i) *perceived space*, the space of everyday social practice, ii) *conceived space*, space as it is formally conceived and intellectualized, especially by scientists, planners, etc., and iii) *lived space*, in which human imagination "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (39). This lived space offers a meeting site between the objective and the subjective, and, as Benjamin Fraser observes, between space and time (*Henri Lefebvre* 13). As Fraser points out, Lefebvre "proposes 'starting out from actual experience, and elucidating it in order to transform it—as opposed to starting from the conceptual in order to impose it'" (*Henri Lefebvre* 13). On Lefebvre's view, then, lived space should be the primary object of study for those seeking to understand social space.<sup>1</sup>

Taking up Lefebvre's theorizations, Edward Soja has written extensively over the past two decades calling for the reassertion of space as a prime of critical social theory, arguing that the dialectic between history and society has for too long excluded and minimized the relevance of spatial concerns, and that, beginning in the late nineteenth century and through much of the twentieth, social theory suffered "a growing submergence and dissipation of the geographical imagination, a virtual annihilation of space by time" (*Postmodern Geographies* 31). Soja's theoretical project calls for the reinvigoration of spatial analysis and the creation a "trialectic" which conceives history, space, and society as implicated in a complex dance of interrelation and mutual influence. Soja questions the

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Lefebvrian thought, especially as it pertains the study of Spain, see Fraser's *Henri Lefebvre and the Spanish Urban Experience: Reading the Mobile City*.

<sup>2</sup> The terms *spatiality*, *historicality* and *sociality* are Soja's "summary terms for the social production of Space,

history/ society binary, but he also questions the binaries within spatial analysis itself. On Soja's view, such analysis has suffered from the entrenchment of a false dichotomy: concrete, empirical, objective spatial analysis was championed as necessary for the creation of a science of Geography and flourished during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but such analysis generally failed to dialogue with subjective aspects of spatial thinking, such as how space is felt and experienced. Soja's project of "thirding" spatial studies requires that empirical and subjective spatialities enter into dialogue. According to Soja, the perhaps common-sense notion that space influences society has suffered, within the realm of social theory, from the taint of determinism; social scientists have wished to avoid any intimation of the idea that people and societies necessarily are as they are because of the environments in which they exist. For Soja, however, the relationship is not a unidirectional one—of determiner and determined—but rather one in which space (along with society and history) is one of the elements of the lifeworld in which subjects exist and with which they interact. On this view, "being" is seen as situated at the center of the interactions between historicity, sociality, and spatiality (*Thirdspace* 3).<sup>2</sup>

What is clear is that today's spatial theorists have moved away from a merely empirical approach to spatial science primarily concerned with mapping, describing, and quantifying, and have worked to counter the treatment of space as, in Foucault's words "the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" ("Questions on Geography" 177). Space, as we have seen, is no longer taken to be an empty container, a *donnée*, or a mere setting for events. This shift in perspective has spread outside of those disciplines most closely identified with space, such as geography, architecture, and urban planning, and has come to

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<sup>2</sup> The terms *spatiality*, *historicity* and *sociality* are Soja's "summary terms for the social production of Space, Time, and Being-in-the-world" (*Thirdspace* 3).

influence cultural and literary studies. Perhaps as a result, space as a factor of literary analysis has moved beyond the study of space as setting, as a simple backdrop for historical, social, and psychological events; indeed, space is now often referred to as a co-protagonist in literature, a way of talking about literary spaces that makes sense given the increasingly relational view of space within social theory.

Much as literary and cultural scholars have been influenced by ideas emerging from diverse disciplines such as psychoanalysis and linguistics, there is now an increasingly vital dialogue concerning questions of space between disciplines such as geography and anthropology on the one hand and cultural studies on the other. Take for example the volume of essays *Knowing your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Identity*, edited by Barbara Ching and Gerald W. Creed, in which anthropologists and literary critics take up the task of analyzing the spatial coordinates of identity politics, paying particular attention to discursive construction of a hierarchy of place in which the rural is subordinated to the urban and in which rural identities are socially marked and subsequently must be defended against the hegemony of the urban and claimed as culturally valuable (3–4). This sort of spatial analysis of identities and subjectivities is not limited, of course, to the rural-urban axis. Néstor García-Canclini's *Hybrid Cultures*, for example, argues that questions of cultural hybridity are deeply concerned both with space and its psycho-social reflexes. Cultural objects and practices (perhaps especially those that serve as touchstones of identity) are often felt to be anchored to places, to belong to or be from somewhere, a fact that does not prevent them from migrating and, in so doing, combining with other objects and practices to create new, hybrid forms, which in turn are often associated with their own set of spatial coordinates and to which subjects form new affective attachments. In this sense, practices which seem



mundane when enacted within a given spatial frame may take on new significance when performed in a new context, even if the practices themselves are not substantially altered.<sup>3</sup>

With hybridity becoming the status quo, then, discourses of belonging—who and what belongs where—are necessarily contested and sometimes tend towards “a longing for authentic values, and journey back (or forward) to a country, a culture, and a citizenship that are less hybrid” (Hedetoft and Hjort xviii), a longing which, in its most xenophobic manifestations, has dark consequences.<sup>4</sup>

In literary and cultural studies and, to a lesser degree, in everyday conversation we have become accustomed to the idea of social construction and performance. For example, nearly twenty-five years after Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, gender is now widely understood as less an expression of a natural category, and more an iterative, patterned practice that is governed by social conventions while simultaneously offering a site of resistance to those conventions. Significantly for my discussion, Butler uses a spatial metaphor when she refers to genders as “ontological locales” (146) of questionable inhabitability. Along similar lines, theorists have come to question the naturalized status of spatial concepts such as nation, place, and community, examining the ways in which such concepts are socially constructed and therefore ontologically shift. Pile and Thrift, following Shotter, write that social constructionism

concentrates on the third space “between” the individual psyche and the abstract systems of principles which supposedly characterise the external world. This is the space of everyday social life, a flow of responsive and relational activities that are joint, practical-moral and situated in character.

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<sup>3</sup> See Eva Moreda (2011) on hearing, in Frankfurt, the music of Galician singer Ana Kiro.

<sup>4</sup> Homi Bhabha mentions a case from his home state of Maharashtra, India, where “the Shiv Sena party turned against the Muslim minority as foreigners” (2004 xxii). Compare also the attempts made by members of birther movement to geographically “other” and delegitimize Barack Obama by asserting he was born outside the U.S.

This is the space of “joint action” in which ‘all the other socially significant dimensions of interpersonal interaction with their associated modes of subjective objective being, originate and are formed.’ (34)

On Shotter’s view, then,

all the familiar ways we have of talking about ourselves, about our world(s), and about their possible relationships which in the past we have taken as in some way primary—we now claim must be seen as secondary and derived, as emerging out of the everyday, conversational background to our lives. (Shotter, qtd. in Pile and Thrift 34)

When applied to the discussion of place, the social constructionist perspective provides an invitation to analytical and interpretive practice. To understand places, it is not sufficient to describe them in objective terms (though this may be useful and necessary); rather, one must offer an account of places as emergent, inherently social phenomena. As Jonathan Lepofsky states:

Place is a site of articulation, a space of negotiation, an unfolding set of relations that meet up and become a temporary order (before becoming something else). Just as there is no essential identity, there is no essential place (despite performances of the politics of place which pursue purity in place, as if place could be abstracted from a space of flows). Places exist in relation to other places and in multiple forms. Neither identity nor place can be completely mapped because of this unfolding process of relationality, a process that is always occurring. (2–3)

This conception of place implies that one role of the geographer—and the social scientist in general—is to elucidate these social processes through narrative, to tell a story about their object of study. If narrative is central to the scientific project of understanding social space in all its emergent, changing, relational complexity, I contend that narrative fiction, because of its expressive plasticity and the range of formal strategies it deploys, often offers its own kind of insight into the manifold nature of social space. In the next section, I will examine some of the ways in which literature and geography are intertwined, and how this relation is manifested in literary and cultural studies.

## Literature, Geography, and Cultural Studies

What is the relationship between literature and geography? Geographers Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard have written that “literature has been used by humanistic geographers to examine the emotional and bodily relationships that exist between people and place” (81), while at the same time pointing out that literature “offers a creative *representation* of a particular place and time, based on experience, imagination, and memory” (83, emphasis in the original). As Holloway and Hubbard go on to explain, representations (literary and otherwise) are linked to

discourses which encompass particular ways of looking at the world [...] In turn, these discourses shape social practices. From this perspective, representation can be seen as a *process* shaping the organization of the world, implying that geographers always need to be aware of who is producing the representation (as well as who is consuming it). (151, emphasis in the original)

In light of this, artistic representations of place are doubly geographic: first in the straightforward sense that they engage explicitly with spatial thematics, and second, in that they contribute, as products of historically conditioned social practices, to what Lefebvre called the production of space. As Nigel Thrift has written, “places have meanings and meanings are always produced, never simply expressed, as part of a wider process of cultural creation. Literature is one way in which such meanings are produced within a culture and ascribed to a place, just as place is often appropriated to produce meanings in literature” (21). Quoting Fekete, Thrift notes that “What art does is to question the extent to which our world is human, and tailored to our humanity. Criticism must make the question conscious as art makes it sensitive” (21). In this way, scholars concerned with literary products are never far from questions of geography and the politics of place. In the rest of this section, I review—with an intent more suggestive than encyclopedic—some of the scholarly work that I see as

operating in the space between literary studies and geography, work that is not always directly germane to my project in this dissertation, but which nonetheless forms a part of its conceptual infrastructure.

In his book *The Country and the City* (1973), Raymond Williams performs readings that explore the connections between social reality and literary representation in a way that explicates “both the persistence and the historicity of concepts” (289). Williams’s project consists not only in tracing representations of the urban and the rural through the history of English literature, but also in linking those representations to one another and to the world outside the text; in this sense, Williams’s work can be seen as foundational to the field of cultural studies, an intellectual current that seeks to repair the deficiencies of purely formalist approaches to literary criticism. As he elaborates,

The witnesses we have summoned raise questions of historical fact and perspective, but they raise questions, also, of literary fact and perspective. The things they are saying are not all in the same mode. They range, as facts, from a speech in a play and a passage in a novel to an argument in an essay and a note in a journal. When the facts are poems, they are also, and perhaps crucially, poems of different kinds. We can only analyze these important structures of feeling if we make, from the beginning, these critical discriminations. (*The Country* 12)

Following in the footsteps of scholars such as Williams, professional social scientists now often turn to literature as source material for their analyses, as Hollow and Hubbard describe. To cite one example, Alex Barley, a geographer who specializes in the concept of home, acknowledges that her work shows how the novels in her corpus “produce versions of India that stretch ‘home’ from something that is of personal or family concern into wider national significance” (qtd. in Blunt and Dowling 84).

In contemporary Spanish studies, Nathan Richardson’s 2002 volume *Postmodern Paletos: Immigration, Democracy, and Globalization in Spanish Narrative and Film, 1950–*

2000—inspired in part by Raymond Williams’s work—takes up socio-spatial dynamics as the point of articulation for and analysis of the material and cultural contours of late-twentieth century Spain, which he sees as heavily influenced by the opposition between the city and the country. Richardson points out that critics have found this fact so obvious as to be unworthy of investigation, but argues that “[t]he keys to the cultures whose depths we so often sound in search of enlightenment await uncovered in the open” (23). After tracing the development of the motif of the city and the country in Spanish literary history and pointing out the “temporal correspondence” (12) between massive migration—primarily within Spain, but also to the *exterior*—and political and cultural change, the author devotes most of the book to close readings of how the city and the country have been imagined in Spanish culture from the 1950s to the Transition and through to the post-1992 era of globalization.

*Postmodern Paletos* demonstrates that these representations have become increasingly ambivalent and complex, reflecting the fact that all Spanish spaces are now hybrids of the rural, the urban, and the global, designations that, in themselves, are “richly layered constructs” (211). At the same time, Richardson’s work explores how these new spaces sponsor new kinds of subjects; in his analysis of Martín-Santos’s *Tiempo de silencio*, for example, the author deftly lays out how Pedro’s dual subjectivity, which belongs to both an “urban present” and a “rural past,” is indexed by his movement within Madrid, where he alternately occupies modern, “neo-urban” sites and deprecated “neo-rural” ones (89).

Ann Davies, in her 2012 study *Spanish Spaces: Landscape, Space and Place in Contemporary Spanish Culture*, uses concepts from geography such as landscape, space, and place, to argue that Spain is iteratively constituted “through the subjects that express their desires through landscapes and thus associations with Spain through those very landscapes”

(166). Davies follows geographer Mitch Rose in moving away from the idea of landscape as “simply a representation of culture and cultural ideologies” and towards a mode of analysis that aims to “read the landscape for a fuller understanding of the cultural system it reflects” (Rose, qtd. in Davies 3). For Davies and Rose, then, landscape is “an unfolding plane of sensory, affective, or perceptual markers registering, and thus effecting the emergence... of subjectivity” (Rose, qtd. in Davies 4) which, at the same time, serves as a repository for the subject’s desire to be part of a society and of a nation. For Davies, the Spanish landscape is “an entity that gestures towards an explicit or implicit desire to bestow ‘Spain’ with meaning” (4). The author points out that her emphasis on subjectivity—and on a Spanish subject that is “hardly monolithic”—results in “a plethora of associations with landscape, space and place that means that Spain itself is not monolithic either. ‘Spain’, then, is the sum of all these subjective viewpoints [...] because the process of forming subjectivity and subjective perspectives of Spain is never ending, Spain is always in the process of becoming” (165).

In *Invention of Space: City, Travel and Literature* (2012)—a book that examines literary production in Spanish, Catalan, French, and English—Enric Bou acknowledges the overlap between his project and that of cultural geography. Bou, quoting Adams, Hoelscher, and Till, writes that his goal is to “explore how worlds, places, landscapes, meanings, and human experiences are socially constructed and help constitute specific cultural contexts” (51). Throughout his book, Bou points out the ways in which space and literature are mutually constitutive, that is, how the experience of space—especially urban space—leaves its imprint on literary form and, conversely, how literature is capable of constructing new ways of looking at space. Following John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Bou invokes the term

“[h]odology” (16)—the study of roads, paths, and journeys— in order to emphasize the importance of the subjective experience of space, of space “as perceived by the user” (cf. Lefebvre’s “lived space”). This perspective, which rejects the geographies of “metric calculation” (16) in favor of what might be called more “private topographies” (to borrow Grzegorzczuk’s term), helps to account for the ways in which space comes to be personified, “a sort of character itself, going beyond its function as a mere locale” (135), and how it functions as a screen onto which characters project their psychic landscape.

Susan Larson’s 2011 book *Constructing and Resisting Modernity: Madrid 1900–1936*, takes on the question of Modern Madrid using a methodology that treats the city not as “a thing in itself, an independent object of inquiry” but rather as “an important element mediating and expressing wider social processes” (31). Larson continues, “What is imagined and what is real about the modern metropolis are both relative in that they depend on who is doing the imagining, who is doing the creating and who is interpreting the built environment” (31). While the author is perhaps chiefly interested in the material aspects of modern Madrid, she also “wants to link urban culture to its historical, economic and spatial contexts” without falling prey to “simplistic economic determinism” (30). Larson’s approach, then, is to examine Madrid’s urban geographies through a variety of cultural products—literature, urban planning treatises, films—, products that allow her to “link the material to the symbolic” (30).

In the Latin American context, Marzena Grzegorzczuk’s *Private Topographies: Space, Subjectivity, and Political Change in Modern Latin America* (2005), explores representations of a specific historical period in Latin America—the period characterized by the shift from colonial rule to independence. Grzegorzczuk’s approach involves linking the macro-level

social phenomena associated with political transitions with the individual-level processes of “implacement”: “attempts that people make to reorganize the space around them—as well as their own selves—in response to a historical event” (3).<sup>5</sup> In line with many geographers, Grzegorzczuk conceptualizes emplacement as a process by which subjects make “space (abstract, indefinite) into place (defined)” (3). The author’s approach differs, however, from the standard account of places as operating “through constant and reiterative practice” (Cresswell 38), and posits that “for this conversion of abstract space into differentiated place, it is necessary to have an implacing event capable of a complex reordering of things” (3). Crucially, then, for Grzegorzczuk, changes in paradigms of emplacement are often the result of shifts in the socio-political tectonics on which the subject stands. What the author proposes with the notion of “private topographies” is that the socio-spatial phenomena that interest her can be studied from the bottom up, by attending to “the individual efforts to give some shape and meaning to the new reality” (5).

### **Toward a concept of *microgeographies***

The notion of microgeographies that I develop in this dissertation overlaps with and is inspired by Grzegorzczuk’s private topographies; both concepts engage with “the subject’s attempts and failures in the process of creating implacements” and explore places that are at times “private in that they are exempt from shared public meanings [...] territories that are endowed by a particular subject with a meaning more intense than the meanings others attach to these territories” (3). Nevertheless, I have chosen not to adopt the term “private topographies” because I hope to emphasize not only *private* experiences of place, but also

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<sup>5</sup> It is not clear to me why Grzegorzczuk opts for this spelling, as “emplacement” is the usual spelling among geographers and in general English usage. In my text, I adhere to the more common spelling, as I do not believe that Grzegorzczuk’s spelling is intended to differentiate her usage from that of other scholars.



place as a negotiation among subjects, and between subjects and larger social structures. To put it differently, microgeographies emerge from the interactions between structure and agency, and from what Cresswell calls “the fine balancing of constraint and freedom” (34) that is the subject of scholars informed by structuration theory (Giddens). Cresswell writes that “[s]tructururation theory attempts to describe and understand the relations between the overarching structures that influences our lives (ranging from big structures such as capitalism and patriarchy to smaller scales [sic] structures such as national and local institutions)” (35). Cresswell cites Allan Pred’s work (“Place as Historically Contingent Process”) as an early example of an approach to place that emphasizes processes, practices, and the interaction between “dominant institutional projects” and “the individual biographies of people negotiating a place” (37). Theorists of everyday life, such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, are also concerned with structure and agency; Certeau, in his account of tactics (versus strategies), conceives practice as a way of pushing against structure, or as Cresswell has it “a tactical art that plays with the structures of place that are provided (39). Lefebvre, for his part, speaks in terms of “everyday life,” the “region where man [sic] appropriates not so much external nature but *his own nature* — as a zone of demarcation and junction between the *uncontrolled sector* and the *controlled sector* of life” (*Critique* 46). Lefebvre identifies “layers” or “spheres” of everyday life, which are experienced by the subject as “all mixed up together” (61) but which may be separated for analytical clarity: the layer of needs, the layer of desires (elaborated from needs), and a third layer that mediates “between the individual and the social” (62):

It is a set of practices, representations, norms and techniques, established by society itself to regulate consciousness, to give it some “order,” to close the excessive gaps between the “inside” and the “outside,” to guarantee an approximate synchronization between the elements of subjective life, and to

organize and maintain compromises. This social control of individual possibilities is not absolutely imposed; it is accepted, half-imposed, half-voluntary, in a never-ending ambiguity; this same ambiguity allows the individual to play with the controls he imposes within himself, to make fun of them, to circumvent them, and to give himself rules and regulations in order to disobey them. (62)

As I stated earlier, in this dissertation I propose a method based on the interpretation of *microgeographies*, which I defined as “aestheticized representations of the highly individual ways in which places are lived, experienced, and contested”. In terms of the interaction between structure and agency, microgeographies are a way of thinking about what Lefebvre calls “a zone of demarcation and junction between the *uncontrolled sector* and the *controlled sector* of life” in terms at once geographical and literary. That is, I am interested in reading narrative representations of relatively small spaces—from the body itself, to a building, a garden, a village, an urban neighborhood—as sites where the individual comes into contact (and conflict) with the forces that order social life. This reading strategy often produces layers of interpretation because it points to the imbrication of the particular within the political: on one level, my readings hew closely to the experiences of individual characters and their necessarily limited perspective, while on another level trying to explicate the ways in which those experiences take place within structures, from the family to local politics, from patriarchy to nationalism.

In this sense, I see microgeographic readings as a form of what Kirsty Hooper has called “lecturas posnacionais” and “lecturas relacionais” (*Writing Galicia* 25–36). While Hooper works with a corpus of texts that connect Galicia to the world (especially the Anglophone world) in an effort to “trace new theoretical maps that reveal the nation as an actor in an ongoing series of transformative encounters that connect the individual with the local, national and global in a mutually responsive network of relation” (32), I pursue a

similar goal by engaging with texts whose geographic range is, for the most part, *intranational*. My corpus is largely divorced from representations of Galicia as “a fully theorized nation” (*Writing Galicia* 13) such as that offered by Fontán’s *Carta geométrica de Galicia*. The texts to which I devote attention in the following chapters only infrequently refer to Galicia as an abstract totality, as an imagined community (Anderson). Consequently, I have preferred to orient my readings around the hodological scale, the scale of the footpath. But as Hooper points out, at least since Otero Pedrayo’s *Arredor de sí*, Fontán’s map has held significance not only in that it represents Galicia as a totality, but also in that it has the power to evoke smaller geographies: “xente que vai polos sendeiros aos muiños e ás feiras, verdeceres de camposantos, fuxir de augas, praias douradas, galgar de ondas nos cóns, velas que sain ronselando o mar, orballeiras sobre os arboredos mestos, rúas de vellas cidades, soedades de esquencidos mosteiros” (Otero Pedrayo 111). To offer another example, in the Manuel Forcadela poem that serves as epigraph to this introduction, “Ti dis: Galiza é ben pequena,” the poet suggests the ways in which small experiences—from the view of a hill at night, to birds taking wing, to a lover’s body—are embedded in larger geographies. As the interlocutor within the poem repeats “Galiza é ben pequena,” the poetic voice reminds us that Galicia, as small as it might be, contains infinite numbers of places or, as Vicente Risco writes in the text which surely inspired Forcadela’s poem, “Ti dis: Galicia é ben pequena. Eu dígoche: Galicia é un mundo,” small in size yet “en fondura, en entidade, é tan grande como queiras” (*Leria* 187). I want to emphasize here that an emphasis on small-scale geographies should not be understood as individualist or apolitical. If Enric Bou, following Claudio Guillén, has written that no political map can account for all the “interspaces” and the “multiplication of countless adjacent fragments” (51–52) of which the world is composed,

perhaps we can imagine microgeographic readings as cartographic insets that magnify sites which cannot be seen in the larger map, but which nonetheless form a part of its totality and exist *in relation* to other sites.

My contention that the everyday and the particular can be loci of political action is echoed by Teresa Moure (whose work I analyze in chapter 1), who states that “moitas das posibilidades políticas que temos agora non son macro. Son micro. Pasan polo terreo da intimidade” (Moure in Vázquez, n.pag.). Along the same lines, Andy Merrifield (following Lefebvre) has written that in spite of the fact that everyday life is “colonized by the commodity, and hence shrouded in all kinds of mystification, fetishism and alienation,” it is also “paradoxically [...] a primal site for meaningful social resistance... Thus radical politics has to begin and end in everyday life; it can’t do otherwise” (qtd. in Fraser 27). Finally, Luce Giard, writing about Michel de Certeau, states

It seems that, beneath the massive reality of powers and institutions and without deluding oneself about their function, Certeau always discerns a Brownian motion of microresistances, which in turn found microfreedoms, mobilize unsuspected resources hidden among ordinary people, and in that way displace the veritable borders of the hold that social and political powers have over the anonymous crowd. (“Introduction” xxi)

In each of the five chapters of this dissertation, then, I undertake readings of recent Galician fiction, readings in which I examine representations of the everyday, the local, and the particular in search of microresistances and microfreedoms, and ways in which, through “sweet obstinance [...] [e]ach of us has the power to *seize power* over one part of oneself” (Giard “Gesture Sequences” 213).

## **Chapter Summaries**

In chapter two, I read Teresa Moure’s *A intervención* as a novel about the relationship between home, memory, narrative, and art. I argue that while we can begin to understand

characters' experience of home through the sort of phenomenological approach to spatial experience professed by Gaston Bachelard, this approach is ultimately hobbled by its apolitical nature. To counter this weakness, I draw from the work of feminist geographers to show how the novel examines the ways in which putatively private or individual experiences of home are embedded in larger structures of power and mediated by memory and by personal and family narratives. Finally, I conclude that the intervention of the novel's title alludes not only to an artistic project, but also to collaborative creative processes as motors of political intervention that function at the scale of everyday life.

Chapter 3 offers a reading of Manuel Rivas's *Todo é silencio* that focuses on two nested sites—the town of Brétema and its abandoned *escola de indianos*—spaces in which local memory and local knowledge are contested, where memory fails, and where the past has been overwritten, effaced, recoverable only in part. In the first section of the chapter, I discuss ways in which Rivas's novel portrays the manipulation of local memory in Brétema, connecting these phenomena to a culture of *caciquismo* and to what Rivas has called *capitalismo máximo*. In the second section, I discuss the *escola de indianos*, as an interstitial, haunted space between history, memory, and forgetting, a place that indexes the truncation of progressive culture in Galicia that began with the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and came to sponsor a culture of silence that persisted throughout the Franco dictatorship (1939–75) and beyond.

In chapter 4, I examine the ways in which Xurxo Borrazás's *Ser ou non* participates in the narrativization of the *hauntological* (Derrida) relationship between Galicia's urban and rural spaces, while also questioning the role of literature in the expression of identity. In the first section, I analyze the novel's treatment of the movement of urban subjects into rural

spaces—metonymically represented by the tiny fictional village of A Pena—, attending to how Borrazás contributes to discourses surrounding the country and the city as coordinates of identity. In the second section, I turn my attention to the novel’s stance toward literature, storytelling, and the expression of marginalized, spectral voices. I conclude that *Ser ou non*, as a text that fights with its own textuality, attempts to resist becoming a memorializing *lieu de mémoire*, thus opening up a space between orality and textuality.

In Chapter 5, I analyze Diego Ameixeiras’s *Dime algo sucio* and *Historias de Oregón*, arguing that these novels contribute to a dystopian conception of the postmodern city as a site of alienation, dissatisfaction, and violence. At the same time, I suggest that the novels also propose the possibility that the city, so often the site of death and dehumanization, can also be a site of creativity and resistance. Throughout my analysis, I examine how Ameixeiras deploys an urbano-corporeal poetics that explores the interactions between the microgeographic scale of the body and the mesogeographic scale of the city to reveal what it means to be an embodied subject in an era characterized by what Lefebvre has denounced as the de-corporealization of space.

Finally, in chapter 6, I read María Reimóndez’s *En vías de extinción*, exploring, in the first section, the ways in which that novel foregrounds language, especially as a reflex of place and as a coordinate of identity. I argue that through this attention to sociolinguistic factors, especially language variation and language choice, Reimóndez not only portrays the sociolinguistic realities of present-day Galicia but also suggests linguistic praxis as the cornerstone of a progressive, cosmopolitan Galician nationalism. In the second section, I focus on the novel’s use of botanical and terrestrial metaphors in the articulation of multiply-

emplaced identities and in the construction of a specifically Galician cosmopolitan sensibility.

Although this dissertation focuses on recent Galician narrative fiction, I believe the reading strategies deployed here may also be useful for interpreting texts from other time periods and other literary traditions. My approach has been influenced by scholars—Bou and Grzegorzczak as I have already mentioned, but also Benjamin Fraser and Amanda Homes, to name a few—working in related fields such as Contemporary Spanish Studies or Latin American Studies. Nevertheless, the choice of contemporary Galician literature as the subject of this study is far from aleatory. Rather, that choice stems from three main convictions: First, that the period of Galician literary history under consideration, one marked by large-scale failures such as the Prestige disaster of 2002 and the economic crisis of the late 2000s, failures that have contributed to growing scepticism as to the ability of institutions to promote social and cultural well-being, is a period during which optimism has often depended on subjects' ability to enact micro-resistances. Second, that the study of products of non-hegemonic cultures, difficult as it may be to justify in some economic or institutional contexts, must be undertaken as part of a just, inclusive approach to humanities scholarship. Finally, that Galicia's current struggles, while deeply particular, resonate with others around the world—from Tamil Nadu to Puerto Rico, from Catalunya to Wall Street—making Galician Studies a small but fertile *leira* in the larger field of Global Studies.

## CHAPTER 2: A CRITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF HOME: TERESA MOURE'S

### *A INTERVENCIÓN*

“Son os remendos os que nos restitúen,  
as cicatrices as que fan fogar” ~Berta Dávila (32)

Geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling have written that home is “a complex and multi-layered geographical concept” that includes “a place/ site, a set of feelings/ cultural meanings, and the relations between the two” (2-3). In the context of my larger argument in this dissertation, taking up the question of home offers a useful point of entry for an exploration of the ways in which individuals are embedded within social structures, and how they use narrative and other creative and interpretive practices to negotiate and work through what home means to them. In this chapter, then, I show how Teresa Moure’s novel *A intervención* (2010) reveals home as a process of intersection between space, identity, and power that is iteratively carried out through narrative, memory, and artistic practice.

Teresa Moure is professor of linguistics at the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela and the author of numerous works across such diverse genres as children’s fiction, essay, and theatre. *A intervención* is Moure’s fourth novel, following *A xeira das árbores* (2004), *Herba moura* (2005), *Benquerida catástrofe* (2007). In Moure’s own words, the novel proposes “unha intervención política” and reflects her desire for Galicians to become aware of their “capacidade para transformar a sociedade en moitos sentidos” (“Teresa Moure” n. pag.). In the author’s view, attitudes toward nature and the awareness of



Earth as an ecological system are especially urgent need of transformation. In her 2008 essay *O natural é político*, Moure argues that global capitalism sponsors an ideology of growth and consumption that must be challenged for the long-term benefit of humanity and the planet. For Moure, *environmentalism* is a mere palliative that allows the world's biggest consumers of energy and resources—those of us living in developed nations—to absolve our guilt through recycling and the kind of “conspicuous conservation” that economists have theorized; Moure advocates instead an *ecological* approach that views the planet as a complex system of which humanity is but one constituent part.

In light of Moure's ecological activism, the fact that *A intervención* centers around an Earth Art project that consists of planting an immense flower garden atop an abandoned mine would seem significant, perhaps all the more so given that, as I write this in the summer of 2013, the people of Galicia are engaged in a massive effort to stop new open pit gold mining operations—proposed by international mining concerns and supported by Galicia's conservative government—from going forward. On Sunday, June 2, 2013, thousands attended a march and rally in Santiago de Compostela to show their opposition to these mining projects, seeking to “protexer ‘o futuro das comarcas’ fronte ‘o capital especulativo’” (Rodil n.pag.).<sup>6</sup> This opposition between concrete, familiar local spaces—such as *comarcas*—and the anonymous forces of international capital is of course a common trope in the age of globalization, and it points to the fact that personal affective relationships with small-scale geographies are instrumental in mobilizing political action and raising awareness

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<sup>6</sup> Amanda Boetzkes writes that Earth Art uses not only the land, but also other “elementals [such as] sky, light, water, and weather” to produce “sensorial plenitude” and “unrepresentability” (*The Ethics* 16). In the context of Moure's novel, the intervention produces in the artists a range of sensory and affective experiences that in some sense defy representation, with the effect that readers are implicitly called upon to enact their own (political and artistic) interventions in order to complete the immersive aesthetic experience that the novel suggests.

of much larger issues of structural oppression.<sup>7</sup> Xurxo Borrazás has written about his experience attending an informational session organized by a local activist group in which speakers outlined the dangers of the mining project proposed for Corcoesto. The author relates that as he listened to the presentation, the slideshow displayed maps and toponyms “entre os que eu vía o lugar dos meus avós, onde nacera miña nai, o Ramallón de Valenza de Coristanco, e Lestón, onde aínda viven o tío Manolo e a tía Carme: a carón da súa casa vai quedar o xigantesco cráter e vai pasar o río Lourido despois de ser desviado” (“A política e o ouro” n.pag.). Perhaps because of the author’s personal relationship with the potentially affected sites, he is especially moved: “Un saíu de alí co corazón encollido e cheo de forza, de argumentos e de amor pola terra que o viu nacer e pola súa xente. Iso é a Política de verdade e non as leas de pouca monta entre o BNG e Anova” (“A política e o ouro” n.pag.). Borrazás, while already intellectually aligned with the anti-mining activists, is inspired by a presentation that has made the danger patent on a personal scale—a crater right next to his aunt and uncle’s house—and, further, has suggested that the solution depends, not on the politicians, but rather on individuals and the community.

In the context of Borrazás’s experience, the etymological connection between ecology and home becomes relevant. While ecological concerns are ultimately global, they are often experienced most immediately at the microgeographic scale. And while we tend to think of home as intensely local and personal, Blunt and Dowling have argued that home is multi-scalar and that “senses of belonging and alienation are constructed across diverse scales ranging from the body and the household to the city, nation and globe” (27).

Furthermore, echoing Sallie Marston, Blunt and Dowling argue that “the social, physical,

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<sup>7</sup> This is reflected in Rodil’s article, which registers anti-mining protesters’ affirmation that “Estamos fart@s de ser unha colonia”.

cultural and emotional infrastructure provided in and by households [...] connects with, and constructs, the scales of home, nation, and city” (28). What, then, does this have to do with planting flowers on an old mine site? Within the context of Earth Art, the intervention from which Moure’s novel takes its title, is a fairly primitive example of a “site-restoration project” or “reclamation art” (Boetzkes 31); primitive in the sense that its first-order effects do not go much beyond “aesthetic revitalization of space,” nor do they contemplate the kind of “ecological resuscitation” (Boetzkes 31) that requires the collaboration of engineers and other specialists. In this chapter, rather than considering the intervention in its literal dimension as a work of Earth Art, I offer a reading of the project as a multimedia community art happening that performs what Blunt and Dowling call a “critical geography of home” and examines not only the materiality of home, but also its social, political, and imaginary dimensions (Blunt and Dowling 30). In this sense, my analysis concords with and amplifies Dolores Vilavedra’s affirmation that *A intervención* urges us to both “cuestionar o canon e a función da arte tal e como adoito a concebimos” and “repensar conceptos tan solidamente establecidos que nin maximamos que poidan entenderse de xeito diferente: a amizade, o amor ou a maternidade” (“De autores” n.pag.).

To briefly summarize the novel, *A intervención* is a polyphonic narrative composed of five sections, each narrated by one of the main characters. These narrations are produced as diaries during a period of several weeks in which the novel’s protagonists are living in a rented house in eastern Galicia and preparing the art project to which I have already alluded. The first narrator, a university student named Leandro Balseiro (hereafter Leandro), tells the story of his own recent past as an artist in search of a project, within which is nested information about his mother’s family of origin. This information is gleaned during

Leandro's visits to his mother's hometown, which visits he undertakes in search of local accounts of the exuberant flower garden—once cultivated by Leandro's grandfather, also named Leandro Balseiro (hereafter Balseiro)—that serves as the inspiration for the intervention. Leandro's mother, Clara Balseiro, a dermatologist, is the second narrator; her diary provides more background on the Balseiro family, including Clara's abandonment by her mother and her father's manic horticulturalism. Clara relates the story of her life in common with Leandro and their family friend Sampaio, and introduces the idea for the intervention, which she conceives as an homage to her father. Sampaio, the third narrator, is a man of a certain age who, more than fifteen years before the main events of the novel, was hit by a car as he neared completion of the *camino de Santiago*, thereafter developing a form of amnesia in which he was able to form new memories, but had no recollection of his life before the accident. Sampaio's diary narrates the arrival of Ingrid, his estranged daughter, and traces the process by which he recovers his memory. Ingrid, a Viennese psychiatrist (!) is the fourth narrator and is pivotal to the structure of the novel: it is she who asks the other characters to keep diaries during their time working together on the intervention. Her narration moves between her own childhood and her observations of the other characters which she hopes to turn into a scientific paper on collective insanity. The last narrator is Candela, a doctoral student married to a renowned history professor and romantically involved with Leandro; her diary, which she writes only after reading the others' contributions, serves a metanarrative function in the text, reflecting on the intervention, its effects on the participants, and the process of documenting it through writing and other media.

This chapter is structured as follows: In the first section, I focus on Leandro's research into his grandfather's garden as the aesthetic model for the intervention, an investigatory process that opens the door to new questions about her mother's childhood home. In the second section, I offer an excursus that explores Clara's relationship with her father's garden in light of the thought of Gaston Bachelard. In the third section, I use Susannah Radstone's notion of *memory work* to analyze Clara's process of placing her childhood home in its socio-political context. In the fourth section, I read Clara's adult life through the lens of what Ann-Marie Fortier calls *homing desires*, the drive to create a sense of belonging. Finally, I conclude that Moure's novel is at once a reflection on the transformative power of the creative process and on the multiple geographies of home.

### **In Search of a Lost Garden**

As I mention in the introduction to this chapter, Moure's novel is a polyphonic narrative, incorporating not only the voices of the five protagonists, but also their renderings of voices from the past, reported dialogue, as well as epistolary exchanges between characters, field notes, and various epigraphs. One of the effects of this multiple voicing is that it allows Moure to present a complex portrait of Balseiro's garden as an element of local color, a setting for certain dramatic events, and, for Clara—I shall return to this point—as a Bachelardian site of memory. Eyewitness reports of Balseiro's garden and its role in the popular history of Clara's hometown are overlaid by Clara's oneiric narrative of being a child in the garden, her adult reflections on the garden, and Ingrid's investigations into the events that transpired there. The reports of neighbors and family members still living in Clara's hometown are elicited by Leandro, who seeks to reconstruct the story of his grandparents that Clara has never shared. The light tone of the resulting narrative reflects authorial sympathies

toward Balseiro as the novel's oddball-in-chief: Balseiro is a man of dubious employability with a prodigious green-thumb and an antisocial streak whom neighbors regard as an eccentric, yet harmless, local character, an interpretation that Moure sets up through a kind of primacy effect, as Leandro's is the first version of events to which the reader is exposed. In this telling, Moure points up the curiosity typical of small town neighbors who make everything their business, hoping to find a "fenda por onde furar" (17), a fissure through which to spy on those who would dare keep something to themselves. Indeed, one neighbor, Maruxa da Pobra de Brollón, literally makes it her business, allowing the curious to view Balseiro's garden—for a fee—from her house. In one sense, the garden is nothing more than an outsized manifestation of what, late in the novel, Candela characterizes as the Galician propensity for the majestic uselessness of flower gardening: "os galegos, por moito que teñamos as casas a medio derrubar, chantamos á porta fermosísimas plantas nun xesto de tenrura fóra do razoábel: as camelias, as laranxeiras, as buganvíleas das entradas das casas deste país non se comen" (283).<sup>8</sup> In another sense, though, the garden is described to Leandro as having had strange powers; local lore surrounding the garden is injected with ample doses of magical realism, for example in the case of a nun who enters the garden only to become overcome by a passion that drives her to take off all her vestments. Here, the garden is a

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<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Gaia, the protagonist of *En vías de extinción* (Chapter 6), maintains an ambivalent attitude toward flower gardening. As we saw in the last chapter, the central metaphor of Gaia's existence is the deep-rooted tree, an index of permanence and solidity. When it comes to flowers, "Ela non entendía moi ben por que alguén tendo terra perdía o tempo botando flores no canto de repolos" (341). Gaia echoes the folk saying *a paisaxe non se come*, thus expressing the rather pragmatic view that, for people who need to eat, the cultivation of flowers is a frivolous endeavor. By contrast, *A intervención* makes a motif of flowers as symbols of useless beauty. Echoing the iconic Vietnam-era image of hippies placing flowers in the barrels of soldiers' guns, the cover of Moure's book displays an image of a single Gerber daisy emerging from the tailpipe of a car. What is fascinating about both images is that they manifest a resistance more symbolic than real: one can easily imagine the sad fate of the flower if the machinery that it penetrates were to be activated; the flower does nothing to stop war or slow global warming. And yet, the contrast between the botanical colors and textures of the flower and the steely, industrial form of the rifle and the tailpipe is oddly moving, an affirmation of values beyond those of geo-politics and the market. The images of flowers planted outside a ruined house, or of a flower in a tailpipe, speaks to the capacity of the symbolic to trump the rational.

place endowed with a potent sensuality capable of undoing the National Catholicism of the Franco regime, producing a *destape monxil* that prefigures the larger cultural *destape* of the Transition. Further examples of this popular narrativization of the garden include the scientifically dubious idea that the plants growing there “exhalaban gases solermeiros que elevaron os termómetros” to such an extent that “as estacións deixaron de notarse” (21), and the notion that the garden was possessed of malefic powers that gave rise to “todas as desgrazas que viñeron despois” (21).

In the early pages of the novel, then, Moure uses oral history to create an aura around the garden and the figure of Balseiro. Leandro receives these auraticizations with skepticism, and, with the paranoia of the amateur ethnographer, wonders whether his informants are fooling him, whether “me contaron esta historia de paraísos perdidos para riren de min” (22). His personal desire is to “poñer orde na memoria colectiva” and to “convencelos de que non puido ser certo o que contan” (21), repeating later “teño moito que aclarar para saber como foi realmente todo o que xa está confundido na memoria colectiva” (38). With this, Moure establishes one of the main themes of the novel: the nature of memory and the tension between objective and subjective modes of producing meaning. Leandro, although he thinks of himself as an artist, has little confidence in the latter, which perhaps explains why his projects—sketched out in innumerable studies that threaten to overrun the house he shares with Clara—never take wing. Leandro is gripped by a totalizing urge, a desire to understand how “realmente foi todo,” echoing positivist historian Leopold von Ranke’s famous statement that historians should “describe the past ‘as it really was’” (qtd. in Rzepka 43). In Moure’s novel, however, Leandro and the other narrators who attempt to “reconstruír a historia” (15) of Balseiro’s garden are repeatedly confronted with the complexity of the

meanings of places and the multifaceted investigatory practices necessary to understand them. Leandro comes to find all his sources questionable; in the same way that he is skeptical of local lore regarding the garden, he also doubts his mother's memories. Leandro observes that Clara, "a pesar de só vivir alí os primeiros anos da súa vida, teima en asegurar que lembra todo como se fose onte"; Leandro's skepticism is further registered in his description of Clara's memory as "esvaradía" [slippery] (16). Moreover, Leandro suspects that his mother's description of the "lugar dos feitos" might not be based on "auténticas lembranzas" but rather might be derived from—or mediated by—a family photograph that ended up in Clara's possession "non sei como" (16). In evaluating the personal and collective memories he is presented with, then, Leandro is frustrated by narratives in which, to borrow Chris Philo's formulation, "the history of fact, detail and precision is refracted through the lenses of imperfect memory and weakly constrained imagination" (12); ultimately, Leandro's investigations leave unsatisfied his desire to settle to the interrogative "como foi realmente todo".

### **Excursus: Gaston Bachelard and the Garden as a Psychological Object**

Moure's novel moves beyond Leandro's attempts at an orderly, objective account of Balseiro's garden by embedding it within what Liz Bondi, et al. have called "emotional geographies": attempts to understand emotion [...] in terms of its socio-*spatial* mediation and articulation rather than as entirely interiorised subjective mental states" (*Emotional Geographies* 3, emphasis in the original). In order to situate my discussion of how the novel explores the linkages between place and affect, I turn now for a moment to the work of phenomenological philosopher Gaston Bachelard, whose writings on space focus on "the imaginative resonances of intimate spaces and their material form, as they are created,



illuminated and experienced through memories, dreams and emotions” (Blunt and Dowling 12). In his 1958 work *La Poétique de l'Espace* (cited here in Maria Jolas’s English translation *The Poetics of Space*, hereafter *Poetics*), Bachelard calls for “the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (8), a process he calls *topoanalysis*. By attending to the subjective and affective experience of space, Bachelard’s work transcends the empirical approaches to spatial science—largely concerned with description, mapping, and quantifying—that reigned during his lifetime and led, in the words of Michel Foucault, to the treatment of space as “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” (“Questions” 177).<sup>9</sup> The fact that, for Bachelard, empiricist geographies fall short of providing a meaningful understanding of space is reflected in Edmund Bunkše’s summary of Bachelard’s conception of home: “a home, even though its physical properties can be described to an extent, is not a physical entity but an orientation to the fundamental values [...] with which a home, as an intimate space in the universe, is linked to human nature” (101–2).

In his forward to the 1994 edition of *Poetics*, John R. Stilgoe writes that

[t]his book opens its readers to the titanic importance of setting in so much art from painting to poetry to fiction to autobiography [...] Bachelard reveals time after time that setting is more than scene in works of art, that it is often the armature around which the work revolves. He elevates setting to its rightful place alongside character and plot, and offers readers a new angle of vision that reshapes any understanding of great paintings and novels. (x)

Here Stilgoe relies on the traditional term *setting* to make sense of emphasis that Bachelard’s project places on space, but, in my opinion, Bachelard’s approach is useful in approaching literary representations of spaces at least in part because it moves beyond mere setting. To

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<sup>9</sup> Chris Philo, following Ley, writes that Bachelard’s ideas “filtered into the thinking of those humanistic geographers who post-1970 countered the empty abstractions of spatial science by turning to the so-called ‘philosophies of meaning’, specifically phenomenology and existentialism, as a window on the fundamental meaningfulness of human being-in-place” (11).

some extent, this may be a terminological problem: *setting* is often understood as the background or surroundings, as the following definitions demonstrate: “the environment or surroundings of anything” (Shaw 340); “the combination of place, historical time, and social milieu that provides the general background for the characters and plot of a literary work” (Murfin 443); “the place and time in which the action of a story or play occurs” (Beckson and Ganz 255); “the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which [a work’s] action occurs” (Abrams 175); and “the background against which action takes place” (Holman and Harmon 440). But Bachelard’s work is not only about claiming setting as an object of aesthetic analysis; it also makes a deeper argument about the role of space in human psychology: Bachelard’s notion of space is closely tied to the mythical and the primordial, to those “fundamental values” of shelter, protection, and intimacy. In other words, Bachelardian space is less a background for some specific action, and more a manifestation of an abiding human desire to experience and return to what Bunkše calls “the timeless solitude and the intimacy and warmth of the refuge” (103). For Bachelard, space is more psychologically important than time; while he concedes that it is often expedient to “localize a memory in time,” Bachelard claims that this “merely a matter for the biographer,” going on to argue that a deep interpretation of the life of a subject must be carried out by “ridding history of its conjunctive temporal tissue” (9), and seeking to understand the ways in which memories are fixed in space. This has implications for the production and consumption of works of art: spaces—especially, for Bachelard, ones in which the subject has experienced solitude and daydreams—persist in the imagination:

And all the spaces of our past moments of solitude [...] remain indelible within us, and precisely because the human being wants them to remain so. He knows instinctively that this space identified with his solitude is creative; that even when it is forever expunged from the present, when, henceforth, it is

alien to all the promises of the future, even when we no longer have a garret, when the attic room is lost and gone, there remains the fact that we once loved a garret, once lived in an attic. (10)

Not only are these images of great importance to the subject, but they are the basis of the manifestation of the experience of place through art. Bachelard believes that, as Bunkše has it, “good poets, through their ‘creative acts,’ are able to capture essences of daydreams of houses and places in them. In that way they orient and inform the daydreams of readers and lead them to daydream further” (103). In an important sense, then, Bachelard’s work is not about space as *setting*, as “the background against which action takes place,” but rather about space as a psychological object unto itself which, through art, achieves what Bachelard calls “transsubjectivity” (xix), reacting “on other minds and in other hearts” (xviii–xix).

In the context of Moure’s novel, it is important to recognize that Balseiro’s garden, while important as a setting, is also important—especially for Clara—as a Bachelardian psychological object. However imperfect Clara’s memory of her father’s garden may be, its psychological import is undeniable and serves as the affective motor for the intervention. While Leandro, as I mention above, is oriented toward the discovery of objective reality, Clara represents a vindication of the creative productivity of accepting one’s own subjectivity and assuming an artistic stance; as she tells her son, “imos decidir dunha vez cal é a intervención e facémola. Déixate de ensaios” (25). When Clara describes her vision for the project, she bids her Leandro and the others to imagine “todas as flores que coñecesdes e máis aínda, moitas máis [...] cantas flores é posíbel pensar,” adding “de pequena vivín nun Edén así” (144). For her, the intervention is a chance to “volver levantar o xardín de meu pai” (135), a childhood paradise loaded with a potent Bachelardian charge, a site that is “*endlessly revisited and forever gone*” (Gerrard, qtd. in Jones “Endlessly” (29), emphasis in the

original). In Clara's memory, the garden is the place where she "pasaba o tempo a farfallar cos caraveis" and "aletargaría[se] mirando a forma das nubes" (127), just the kind of oneiric activities that Bachelard believes are required to "inhabit with intensity" (xxxviii). Moreover, for Clara, the garden is a space that protects her from harm, where the flowers care for her like a mother (127), a place where, in Bachelard's words, "protective beings live" (7); in sum, the garden is the place where the young Clara has experienced the "fundamental value" of home and intimacy. For Bachelard, this kind of childhood experience is essential to artistic expression. And while Bachelard emphasizes the transsubjective potential of the poetic image rendered in language, Clara proposes another kind of poesis, an horto-poetic intervention rooted not only in her desire to reproduce for herself the aesthetic pleasures of her father's garden, but also in the hope that the project will make an impression "on other minds and in other hearts" and do what she calls "[imprimir] un novo rumbo á existencia colectiva" (144).

### **Memory Work and Critical Geographies of Home**

Clara's artistic vision calls for an isomediatic adaptation of her father's garden: a "remake" in the same medium. Like many Earth Art and performance art projects, however, the intervention spawns a range of co-products across various media, including Candela's "inventario detallado de especies coas fotografías necesarias" (275).<sup>10</sup> The novel we hold in our hands, for its part, represents the *making-of*, a narrative record of the artistic process. Although I have suggested that the intervention is aimed at producing a transsubjective aesthetic effect, the narrative registers a range of unintended, emergent *intrasubjective* effects brought on by the creative process. In the second section of *A intervención*, "A semente dos

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<sup>10</sup> The reader is urged to consult Boetzkes's *The Ethics of Earth Art* for examples of the ways in which artists contend with the documentary urge that accompanies performative and site-specific art. See especially pp. 35–44; 58–63; 76–100.

soños,” Clara constructs a new, more problematic narrative of her childhood home, the place that Leandro calls the “xardín que marcara o pasado da miña nai” (74). To borrow Susannah Radstone’s term, Clara’s narration reflects a process of *memory work*: “writing and research [...] that ‘works over’ or takes as its raw materials personal or collective memory” (196–7). As Clara states it, Leandro’s investigations into their family’s past—investigations into collective memory—oblige her to “facer o esforzo de lembrar, despois de toda unha vida esquecendo” (91). By allowing Clara to explore the tensions and interactions between her own most intimate Bachelardian memories and the memory work of (auto)biography, Moure transforms Balseiro’s garden—and, by extension, Clara’s childhood—into a contested space, showing how, in Steve Pile’s words, “[s]tories of the self are ‘produced’ out of the spatialities that seemingly only provide the backdrop for those stories or selves (qtd. in Jones “An ecology of emotion” 214).

In this sense, Moure is performing—through narrative fiction—a critical geography of home. Blunt and Dowling stipulate that such a project must examine “the political, social and economic implications of people’s relationships to place and definitions of home” (14), a perspective that runs counter to the Bachelardian idea that to grasp the poetic import of places, we must “desocialize” (10) our memories of them. Indeed, Blunt and Dowling state that the philosopher of intimate spaces, “like many humanistic geographers who have written on the home,” imagines home to be “an essential place for the intimacy and creativity of human life” (12), a perspective that renders difficult more critical constructions of home as a “complex place shaped by negative as well as positive emotions and experiences” (12). In *A intervención*, Clara initially lacks the ability to question or refigure her Bachelardian memory of her father’s garden; her poetic recollections of dwelling in it serve to block her ability to

remember the garden as a site of trauma. As her narration advances, however, Clara begins to place these recollections in their larger social context. As this contextualization takes place, the representation of Balseiro's garden becomes more complex, and the local color and playfulness that characterize Leandro's section begins to mix with a more somber tone that reflects Clara's coming to terms with the darker aspects of her past and the increased objectivity with which she comes to view her early family life.

One of the major themes that emerge through Clara's memory work is that of the sexual politics that governed her parents' generation; significantly for my analysis, the division between the sexes is schematized by the division of the Balseiro property between the garden—outdoor, in some sense public, associated with men—and the house—private, indoors, is associated with women.<sup>11</sup> Reconstructed haphazardly in the wake of a fire, the house is described as “unha casoupa [...] que se viña abaixo decontino porque fora construída sen amor [...] unha casa, en fin, que malamente podía terse en pé” (101).<sup>12</sup> This description of the house's structural instability brings to mind María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar's call for readings that show how Galician literature—as the putative word-house of national identity—“amosa todas as súas fendas” (*Fogar* 175) and, in so doing, participates in a poetics of rupture with flat, seamless, and unitary conceptions of collective identity. Moure's

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the public/private division of space in the context of sexual politics, see Armstrong and Squires “Beyond the Public/Private Dichotomy: Relational Space and Sexual Inequalities.” *Contemporary Political Theory* 1 (2002): 261–283 and Manuel Delgado, *Sociedades Movedizas: Pasos hacia una antropología de las calles*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2007. 224–263.

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps significantly, the only part of the tumbledown house that is still solid is the dovecote, constructed of stone, the original purpose of which was to provide the family with extra income, but which instead becomes an engine of calamity. I will leave for future investigation the analysis of the ways in which this dovecote maintains intertextual connections with other works such as Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant* and Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate*. Neus Carbonell, for one, has analyzed Natàlia's desire to do away with the doves living in her apartment as a rejection of “the reproductive system of patriarchy” (23) and as a manifestation of her desire to reclaim a space and an identity that was taken from her by her husband.

depiction of the Balseiro house effects a similar break with essentializing discourses, this time of home, by eschewing the Bachelardian “dream shelter”—a “snug, protected house which is well built on deeply-rooted foundations” (*Poetics* 72)—in favor of a ramshackle building that provides a physical index of the *unhomely* affect that the Balseiro women experience there, as the very phrase “construída sen amor” signals. Just as Rábade Villar points to the strange compatibility of “o sentido de pertenza e o sentido de desherdanza” (*Fogar* 178)—an observation to which I return in Chapter 3—Blunt and Dowling note that the twin concepts of homeliness and unhomeliness allow geographers of home to understand “the simultaneity of feelings of belonging and alienation associated with home” (121). On this view, the home, while idealized as a locus of love, belonging, and positive, *homely* affect, is equally capable of containing the opposite: hate, alienation, and negative, *unhomely* affect. As Freud demonstrates in his essay “The Uncanny” (1919), the German word *heimlich* [“homely”] “is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which are not mutually contradictory, but very different from each other” (sec. I). He concludes that “[t]he uncanny (*das Unheimliche*, ‘the unhomely’) is in some way a species of the familiar (*das Heimliche*, ‘the homely’)” (sec. I). To speak in terms of “unhomely” homes, then, is to engage with the tensions contained within the very idea of home. Homi Bhaba has written, “You must allow me this awkward word—‘unhomely’” (“The World” 445); for Bhabha, unhomeliness provides a vantage point from which to contemplate postcolonial subjects’ “failure to create a dwelling place,” their “unsettled lives” (“The World” 446), and how the “traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history” relate to “the wider disjunctions of political existence” (448).

In *A intervención*, Clara's grandmother dona Pilar, her mother Susanna, and her aunts—Pamela and the unnamed “a que se matou”—all find themselves mired in such traumatic ambivalences, trapped in a house that has turned on them and consumes their vital energies while giving little in return. As Leandro recounts, the women

traballaban como burras na casa e cosendo o enxoval das máis ricas, as donas das tendas de ultramarinos ou as fillas do propietario da ferraxaría. E se obtiñan cadanseu xornal, como logo o investían no sustento familiar e no amaño dunha casa vella que lles caía en riba a cachos, os cartos volvían aos ultramarinos ou á ferraxaría de onde acababan de saír e todos contentos. O peculiar humor da familia resoa nas declaracións que a pequena delas, Pamela Balseiro, me dixo entre risadas, «gastabamos todo en mantermos a casa en pé e como ía manterse, se as casas nunca tiveron pés?». (39)

This passage, drawn from Leandro's section “Os amores imposíbeis,” still shows the jocular tone of the novel's early pages, while also serving to present the structural inequalities—both sexual and economic—of the society in which the narrative takes place, inequalities that frustrate the Balseiro women's attempts to create a homely home. If, as María Xosé Queizán writes, “[a] sociedade masculina ten por finalidade que nengunha muller teña posibilidades de existencia sen relación cos homes” (58), the precarious economic situation in which the Balseiro women find themselves results both from the fact that the women have no profession and therefore no means of making a living, and from the fact that Balseiro, the man on whom they are economically dependent, is inept in his socially-assigned role as a provider, a point to which I shall return.<sup>13</sup> Echoing Queizán's affirmation that the family home is, for women, “a nosa prisión, onde nos afogamos e frustramos” (64), for the Balseiro women, the house becomes a trap, in sense that it both binds them economically and

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that dona Pilar, Clara's grandmother, was trained as a schoolteacher and returned to that profession after her husband's death. After her retirement, her daughters are hard-pressed to replace her income, lacking as they do any professional training.



physically contains them, stuck as they are inside it, day after day, *borda que borda*, trying to make ends meet with underpaid needlework.

For the female members of the Balseiro household, the physical entrapment they experience is an outgrowth of existential entrapment (Leong n.pag.) brought about not only by their economic circumstances, but also by the pressure to conform to social norms of conduct. Queizán refers to the social pressure exerted on women to be “abnegadas e amatísimas esposas” and to “aparentar, polo que dirán, unha felicidade que non senten e un paraíso doméstico que é, de feito, un inferno” (64). This dynamic is commented upon by Clara, who indicates pride and shame as socio-emotional factors that contribute to the claustrophobic experience of entrapment: regarding her mother, Clara notes that “[q]uizais o *orgullo* non a deixaba saír da casa para pedir axuda” (112, emphasis mine); regarding her aunt, Clara narrates that the elder Balseiro sister commits suicide “*avergoñada* pola deshonra que caera na casa co escándalo financeiro en que se vira envolto meu pai e sabedora de que con todo iso xa nunca daría escapado, non soportou a estreitura da vida que fabricaran entre todos para ela” (92, emphasis mine). In this last passage, the polysemy of *casa*—a noun that refers not only to a building, but also to a family, a lineage, and a home—reflects how the social structures in which the characters find themselves embedded are concretized in the house, which is experienced as a stricture. Even if one manages to escape from the physical restriction imposed by the house, such a move often does nothing to facilitate the escape from the patriarchal family structure. In the case of Pamela, who marries and moves to the Americas, her motivation for doing so is described by Clara in terms of a desire to “fuxir daquela casa do terror” (112). Pamela herself, however, minimizes the exceptionality of the Balseiro home, painting the family itself as a structure from which all women seek to flee:

“Non era nada especial, non vaias crer, viamos o mesmo en todas as familias, en todas as casas... e non é que estivésemos conformes, eh? Que va! Se todas estabamos desexando largar de onde estivésemos: as solteiras, da casa dos pais; as casadas de onda o home!” (40).<sup>14</sup> Pamela’s professed attitude of “a morte talvez nos iguale a todos” but “a vida e as súas oportunidades son cousa ben distinta” (39–40) is emblematic of women’s pragmatic resignation to the status quo. By taking Pamela’s discourse—once again jocular in tone—together with Clara’s darker description of a “casa do terror,” we find evidence that Clara’s memory work has radicalized her and made her conscious of the inequalities that lie behind her paradisiacal memories of her childhood.

A discussion of the sexual politics of the Balseiro household must, of course, include a discussion of Balseiro himself. In a certain sense, Balseiro is to blame for the family’s financial troubles and for the chain of unfortunate events that mark Clara’s childhood. As I mention above, Balseiro is a failure as a breadwinner, described a “lume-en-cu que non daba parado” (40) and “autoritario, inxusto, bebedor, bardallas, malencarado e con dificultades para que un traballo lle durase algo máis dunha estación (19). What little professional success Balseiro enjoys as a salesman and bookkeeper for a car dealership is little more than a masquerade, which Joseba Gabilondo defines as “an activity and position whereby a subject performs a sexual-gender identity that the subject knows is not ‘natural or biological’ but is demanded from him/her in order to occupy a position in the symbolic order of society” (“Masculine” 81). But while Balseiro performs the role of breadwinner, participating, moreover, in the modernizing project of bringing automobiles to Galicia, the hollowness of this performance is ultimately undone by his compulsive aesthetic tendencies: abandoning

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<sup>14</sup> This echoes Judith Halberstam’s explanation of the romantic comedy as a genre predicated on the “misguided belief that in passing from father to husband the woman starts life anew” (76).

the principles of good accounting, and symbolically the capitalist order, Balseiro transforms the regulatory function of his bookkeeping into an exercise in formal aesthetics, producing balance sheets that, while completely fraudulent, “desprendían as virtudes de que o seu autor carecía: eran equilibradas, lúcidas e fermosas e a exquisita factura dos trazos, a perfección do aliñamento, a brancura das marxes escrupulosamente respectadas” (56). When Balseiro is, inevitably, fired from his job, the mask falls away as he gives up any attempt at paid employment and dedicates himself full-time to his garden. In this way, the garden becomes symbolic of Balseiro’s rejection of—and inability to sustain—the paterfamilias masquerade.

While Balseiro is depicted as an unstable, unreliable individual whose abdication of responsibility for his family causes suffering and is therefore indefensible, in another sense, Balseiro, like the women in his family, is harmed by the sexual politics of obligatory domesticity. Late in the novel, Candela remarks that “[q]uizais a súa única rareza consistiu en usar unha leira enorme de xardín en vez de afrontar co seu cultivo tantas necesidades económicas como lle caeron enriba. A partir de aí a desgraza abateuse sobre el” (282–83). In other words, Balseiro, although ill-suited to the role of paterfamilias, has chosen marriage as his best option in the context of the society in which he is embedded. And, although Queizán has argued, not without merit, that “a familia monogámica é estruturalmente un modo de dominación sobre as mulleres e os nenos” and that “as mulleres, no meio familiar, fan que os homes e os nenas estexan a gusto” (57),<sup>15</sup> it is also the case that both men and women are socially coerced into perpetuating such a family structure. In *A intervención*, neither Susana

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<sup>15</sup> Iris Marion Young concurs with Queizán’s view and with “feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir [argue] that the comforts and supports of house and home historically come at women’s expense. Women serve, nurture, and maintain so that the bodies and souls of men and children gain confidence and expansive subjectivity to make their mark on the world” (134). Young goes on to argue, however, that we should not “reject the values of home, but instead [...] claim those values for everyone” (161).

nor Balseiro seems to take seriously the notion that marriage entails the production and reproduction of the kind of household in which a stable income and an orderly home are primary desiderata. We have already seen what form Balseiro's performance of the paternal role takes; Susana, for her part, is described as “unha rapariga coa cabeza a paxaros” (70) with no notion that “[s]e puidese esperar dela que contribuíse ao sustento, ou que dedicase algún tempo ao ben común, ou sequera que ocupase a súa cabeza coas cuestións, sen dúbida prosaicas, da vida doméstica” (70). Yet, in spite of this, the two do marry. While Moure's novel may, on some level, lay the blame for the fate of Susana and Balseiro's marriage at the feet of these hapless subjects themselves, on another level it suggests that these two should never have attempted to set up housekeeping in the first instance. The fact that they do so and fail constitutes a critique of the patriarchal, heterosexual family as the sole model for the organization of home life, a point to which I shall return later.

To return to the spatial dynamics of the Balseiro property, while the entrapment of the Balseiro women is associated with house and its interior spaces, Balseiro exemplifies the trope of mental entrapment, a condition in which “the insane are trapped in their own mental universe, into which no one else can penetrate” (Leong n. pag.). On this reading, the garden becomes the physical manifestation of Balseiro's *minifundio mental*; it is a deeply autocratic space that responds only to the obscure vision of its gardener, and that, while beautiful to the eye, is illegible under the kind of social grammar that construes gardens as homely spaces in which to convene with nature, relax, and create an atmosphere of comfort and well-being.<sup>16</sup> The garden also represents a paradox: although Balseiro himself regards the garden as

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<sup>16</sup> See Bhatti and Church (2004) for a discussion of the meanings ascribed to gardens in late twentieth-century England, which highlights privacy, relaxation, “getting away from it all” and “making a house a home” as the most important meaning of gardens for the individuals studied.

private, in fact the garden is exposed to the gaze of curious neighbors and seems to project outward, burgeoning forth with greater and greater intensity as Balseiro himself turns inward moving ever farther away from his assigned role as provider. At its peak, the flourishing of the garden offers an inverse indicator of the effort Balseiro invests in his family; as Clara conveys, her father

mergullárase con frenesí no oficio de xardineiro e non consentía interrupcións, ademais de que castigara as mulleres da súa casa co silencio porque elas, que non sabían estar caladas, tentaran unha ou dúas veces requirir del algún plano para o futuro. O futuro xa non existía. Debían metelo na cabeza. (92)

If, as Marsha Meskimmon writes, home-making is a future-oriented task that “link[s] us beyond ourselves to others” and “enables us to imagine our homes, identities and communities as spaces of inter-subjective engagements” (30), Balseiro’s focus on his garden to the exclusion of his family constitutes a form of rebellion against family and domesticity, and an expression of his particular frustrations with the masculinity he finds himself unwilling or unable to perform.

This frustration reaches its apogee when Balseiro, reacting to Susana’s departure, undertakes a process of home-making in reverse, in which he pulls the house apart piece by piece, ripping out towel bars, taking down mirrors, and throwing the beds, dressers, blankets and even the refrigerator into the garden (126).<sup>17</sup> The outdoor space, previously described as a paradise, becomes a “vertedoiro,” a dump into which the house, turned inside out, is deposited. Although Balseiro is the agent of this evulsion, it also seems that the house, left

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<sup>17</sup> In the context of my discussion of the sexual politics of home, the circumstances of Susana’s departure are worth noting. The novel explains that “daquela a muller que abandonase o seu home podía ser reclamada e devolta pola Garda Civil”; for this reason, Susana cannot simply leave Balseiro. Instead, she must disappear in such a way that she cannot be found. This “secuestro consentido” (115) is orchestrated by Susana’s father, who enlists the one of Susana’s former suitors to take her to Buenos Aires to start a new life.

without women, becomes subject to the forces of entropy, signaling the degree to which the integrity of the traditional, heterosexual, patriarchal household is actually dependent on female agency, even that of such an unlikely housewife as Susana.<sup>18</sup> The result is an interpenetration of the male and female realms, in which both spheres are broken and disordered; in a final Rodoredan flourish, the garden is definitively rendered abject by a plague of doves that leaves the space “cuberto de esterco, de plumas, de sangue, e impregnado dun cheiro infernal” (127), and is set ablaze some days later by Balseiro, who, by destroying the property, symbolically sends domesticity up in smoke.<sup>19</sup>

It would be logical to assume that this decidedly unhomely scene would be for Clara the defining spatial representation of a childhood marked by loss, for, having been left behind, apparently forgotten, by her mother, Clara is present to witness the destruction of the house and the defilement of the garden. Yet once again we see that local accounts of Clara’s last days in the garden, such as that of Olga Vicedo, take a breezy tone, affirming that Clara survived happily in the garden in the days following Balseiro’s rampage: “Olga Vicedo aínda asegura que nos días que tardaron en entrar durmín no mato das hortensias e, aínda que Ingrid non o crea, sobrevivín a base de beber a seiva leitosa das camelias e de chuchar os estames dos amarilis” (127). Clara, for her part, ratifies this version of events, claiming that “[s]en ninguén que coidase de min, aletargaríame mirando a forma das nubes en medio dun aroma tan intenso a lilas que aínda lembro” (127), testimony that, significantly, combines the

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<sup>18</sup> Simone de Beauvoir writes that “[f]ew tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition” (451); Young explains that on Beauvoir’s view, “man’s subjectivity draws on the material support of women’s work, and this work deprives her of a subjectivity of her own” (148).

<sup>19</sup> It seems that Balseiro is killed in the fire, although this, like many events in the novel, is a subject of debate among the protagonists; as Leandro says, “O que xa non tolero é que me digan—e é mamá quen o asegura—que o vello non morreu cando ardeu a casa” (22).

supposition of the conditional verb “aletargárame” with the claim to the authority of personal memory that is coded in “aínda lembro”. Indeed, throughout this scene Moure effects a complex blending of Clara’s shiny childhood memories, her adult perspective, and the results of the memory work she has undertaken, juxtaposing various narrative positions to reflect Clara’s roles as chronicler and as protagonist. Owain Jones has written that “[o]ur imagination needs to work with our memory and we need to recall the feelings and emotions themselves, as far as is possible, as well as narrative accounts of events. We need our memories to work in the first person and not the third person” (34). Clara’s narrative, however, shifts from first- to third-person narration, sometimes even mixing them in the same sentence through apposition, for example, “eu, a nena que sobrevivíu a tolemia” (128). In a statement such as “meu pai tomou a xustiza pola man e prendeu lume á casa” (128–9), Moure employs Clara’s adult first-person narrative voice and thus implies Clara’s ownership of that analysis of Balseiro’s intention; by contrast, a passage like the one below is narrated in the third-person and suggests Clara’s desire to distance herself from any claims as to the veracity of the narration, a desire signaled also by the adverb “disque”:

Os veciños lanzáronse dentro para atoparen *a nena* que, *disque*, cercada polas lapas, tomaba impasíbel a súa ración de pétalos de hibisco desa mañá. Tiña a cara tan suxa, toda cuberta de pole e seiva, do sangue pegañento dos vexetais, que o seu rostro puido salvarse das queimaduras que afectaron o resto do corpo. Para levala ao hospital sen lle inflixiren máis danos, Moncha Latas e Olga Vicedo, transplantaron a un tarro a camelia rosa. Foi difícil de explicar no hospital, mais para curaren a nena tiñan que deixar entrar canda ela a árbore á que se abrazaba. (129, emphasis mine)

In this passage, while Clara uses the third person to describe events that supposedly happened to a certain *nena*—a possible version of herself—her inclusion of those events in her own narrative is significant. For Clara as an adult, a doctor, and as a modern subject, narrative distance is helpful in allowing her to assimilate popular, even fantastical, beliefs

into her narrative. At the same time, these elements are required for the narrative to be true for Clara in a comprehensive sense: Although Clara has left the small town culture that her parents occupied, she retains some of its ludic, oneiric, confabulatory spirit.

In my view, the formal complexity of the narrative that Clara constructs in order to understand her father's garden suggests the impossibility of any definitive representation of that space. Moreover, as testament to her own loss and *desarraigo*, Clara's narrative is bound to discursive complexity; as Rábade Villar has argued, the nature of dispossession and loss forecloses any "posición discursiva simple" lest the "tentación de facer pronunciabile o impronunciabile [reduza] un labor de fidelidade a un traballo de representación" (178). As a gesture toward a critical geography of home, Clara's narrative begins to make an accounting of both the homely and unhomely dimensions of her childhood home and garden. By reading this narrative against—or perhaps in parallel with—Bachelard's proposal that the poetics of space is accessed by desocializing memories, we can see that Clara's memory work is a particular kind of political intervention in which she "resocializes" her childhood memories by submitting them to the scrutiny of her adult self, a process that in turn makes her childhood experiences legible within their broader social context, thus positioning the microgeography of childhood within the larger-scale social structures relevant to the adult subject. In this way, the patriarchal family comes into focus as a "casa [...] atravesada dende dentro, e dende antigo polo sentido da desherdanza" (Rábade Villar *Fogar* 173).

### **Homing Desires**

In the previous section, I argued that *A intervención* performs a critical geography of home that emphasizes memory work and the process of coming to terms with the past. In this section, I will dilate the gap between Clara's childhood (the object of her memory work) and



the novel's present (the time during which that work is undertaken) to demonstrate the ways in which Clara, in the decades following the destruction of her childhood home, creates a new home *ex nihilo*. Although Clara does not consciously conceive of her life as a reaction against her home of origin, through her attempts to satisfy what Ann-Marie Fortier, following Avtar Brah, calls "homing desires"—the subjective need to "feel at home in the context of migration [...] symbolically (re)constituting spaces which provide some kind of ontological security" (129)—Clara issues an intuitive, pre-theoretical response to her childhood home and the ideological apparatus that undergirds it. In what follows, I examine some of the creative processes in which Clara engages as she constructs a new home that is, in many regards, more conducive to happiness than her home of origin.

In Moure's fiction, homing desires are manifested as a desire to do what Fortier calls "leaving the originary home behind, fixing it in the distant past, and seeking hominess elsewhere" (130).<sup>20</sup> In *A intervención*, Moure examines, largely through the character of Ingrid, a psychiatrist, the role of strategic forgetting in Clara's process of navigating life as an orphan. For Ingrid, one of the paradoxes of Clara's character is that, in spite of having been raised in an orphanage, one of those un-homely homes that Ingrid describes as "centros de reclusión insalubres, mal ventilados de aires novos" (220), Clara is a person who "[p]arece na súa forma de falar, de abordar os afectos, de se chantar perante o mundo, a derradeira irmá dunha familia calquera, cuberta de mecos e coidados" (221). From the psychiatrist's perspective, Clara's success in self-fashioning and the impression she gives of being at home in the world and in social relationships—encoded in the botanical image of *chantarse*

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Moure's novel *A xeira das árbores* (2004) features a female protagonist—also named Clara—who conceives of single motherhood as a means of breaking with the past and with the patriarchal family model (Rodríguez Rodríguez 68).

*perante o mundo*—is a falsification predicated on the elision of the past, as exemplified by Clara’s long time habit of refusing to “contar datos mínimos, como onde nacera ou cando, temerosa de que os seus interlocutores puidesen relacionala con certos sucesos estraños que aínda se gardan nas hemerotecas” (219). Informed by a psychoanalytic disciplinary tradition that deals in “the continuity of psychic materials from childhood through into adult life” (Philo 15), Ingrid’s analysis of Clara’s persona is negative in the sense that, in seeking continuity, it emphasizes the lacunae in Clara’s autobiography. Only by reflecting on Clara’s childhood habit of “contarse historias a si propia” (223) does Ingrid begin to value the “imaginings, the fantasies [that] shape children’s worlds (and geographies) *from within*” (Philo 15, emphasis in the original), thus reconceptualizing Clara’s persona as a daughter of a good home as a positive act of creation and imagination—driven by homing desires—through which she carves out a place in the world, elaborating a kind of *true lie* through which she constitutes herself. With this observation, Ingrid discovers that Clara, by constructing stories and making them real through performance, has found an antidote to the suffering of orphanhood.

Clara also pursues the satisfaction of her homing desires by *re-membering* her home, a process that Fortier describes as “attaching [home...] to bodies and relationships that touch us, or have touched us, in a meaningful way (131). One of the principal ways in which Clara effects this process of re-membering is through her relationship with Sampaio. By embracing the amnesiac pilgrim, Clara adds a new *member* to her “chosen family” (Weston 106, see also Weeks et al.), one who, like Clara, is engaged in the process of “inventarse unha biografía para diante” (36). For Clara, Sampaio’s amnesia is a representation of a break with the past, and, conversely, his presence is an affirmation of creative potential inherent in

living one's life as an emergent narrative, unfettered by what has come before. Sampaio becomes part of the home Clara has made for herself and a frequent *comensal* at the pinewood table that Leandro describes, in a lovely distillation of the materiality of home, as “fregada e refregada para o uso íntimo e para os convites en máis de mil comidas” (65). If home is the confluence of people, places, and practices, Clara and Sampaio's shared meals serve to illustrate that intersection: “Coa seguranza das unións de longo tempo, os membros deste matrimonio pouco convencional que eramos puñamos a mesa, servíamos a sopa, aliñabamos a ensalada, todo sabendo o punto que lle gustaba ao outro, o que é esencial, na miña opinión, para un bo convivio” (107). Setting the table, serving the soup, dressing the salad with someone else's tastes in mind: For Clara, who as small child “chuchaba o mel das flores” (219) and later, in the orphanage, survived on a diet of a “puré que amalgamaba nin se sabe que substancias acompañado dunha salchicha escuálida” (220), these practices are a way of “doing home” and rectifying past deficiencies in the domestic experience.<sup>21</sup>

In light of my discussion in the last section of the sexual politics of the Balseiro home, it is interesting to consider the ways in which the home that Clara constructs as an adult pushes against the hegemony of the heterosexual nuclear family and articulates a dissident discourse of home. In her literary production, as in her critical and theoretical writings, Moure often returns to themes related to family and affective relationships, for example in *Benquerida catástrofe* (2007), a novel that interrogates the relationship between gender, identity, and attraction, and *Unha primavera para Aldara* (2009), a play that explores relations of equality embedded within patriarchal structures and spaces. Viewed in

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<sup>21</sup> I take this phrase from “‘Doing Home’: Patriarchy, Caring, and Space” by Bowlby et al. in which the authors point to the performativity of home.

comparison with these earlier works that participate in an explicitly queer discourse, *A intervenção* is markedly un-queer; heterosexuality is everywhere you look in the novel and, as we have just seen, even Clara and Sampaio's relationship, which is not sexual, is described as a marriage, albeit an unconventional one. Seen from another angle, however, perhaps the unconventionality of Clara and Sampaio's relationship—and their happiness with each other—is precisely the point. In spite of the mutual affection that unites them, they live independently and need not rely on one another economically or for the execution of their daily affairs.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the conventional marriages represented in the novel are disastrous, a point underscored by the physical destruction of the shared dwelling—as we have already seen in the case of Clara's childhood home—and by other metaphors that link marriage to physical structures. For example, as the novel progresses and Sampaio's life story emerges, his marriage to Ingrid's mother, Bettina, is described as a building that “se viñera abaixo” and in which “a felicidade non cabía” (110). In both cases, the compromised materiality of dwellings is called upon to signal the decay of the immaterial structures of home, family, and marriage; regardless of whether one finds these metaphors evocative or aesthetically effective, they point to the impermanence and vulnerability—perhaps even the underlying unsoundness—of marriage as an institution.

In this context, the circumstances of Clara's maternity are significant. Clara's relationship with Omar, Leandro's father, is described as natural, not mediated by the conventions of matrimony or courtship: “Omar chegou de súpeto, sen aviso, e fixo noite na

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<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that Clara and Sampaio both seem to enjoy freedom from economic concerns. Sampaio is retired and lives off his savings, while Clara, as a doctor, seems more than able to provide for herself and, what is more, can afford an extended leave to participate in the intervention. I leave for future research the question of to what degree Moure's characters are bourgeois bohemians (Brooks) whose embodiment of counter-culture values is predicated on a comfortable upper-middle-class socio-economic position.

súa casa cunha naturalidade fóra de toda norma e así fóra de toda norma se amaron” (239).

Here, the unconventional nature of their relationship is encoded in their refusal of the social regulations that govern the use of domestic space.<sup>23</sup> Clara’s apartment, unlike the spaces associated with matrimony, is not sanctioned as a site for intimate acts; in this context, Clara’s bedroom becomes a site of resistance in which “naturalidade” is juxtaposed with and defeats “norma,” which casts the mundane fact of sex outside of marriage as a dissident act that questions the hegemony of marriage as a structure that organizes and controls sexuality and procreation. This extra-normative sexual practice ultimately leads to Clara’s becoming pregnant, at which point Moure kills off Omar in a motorcycle accident. Although Omar’s death is a great loss for Clara and forecloses any hopes the two lovers may have had of forming a new home together, on a more symbolic level, Omar’s death signals the caducity of the paterfamilias and clears the way for Clara to form a woman-headed home not inscribed within the dominant model of the nuclear family.<sup>24</sup>

Ultimately, single motherhood is an opportunity for Clara to do with her family history what Manuel Rivas bids us to do with cultural tradition: “anovala, ensanchala, transgredila” (*A boca* 24). While Clara recognizes in herself a certain artistic temperament that she sees as an inheritance from her father, as part of her nature as a Balseiro, she chooses to turn that temperament to her “exercicio da maternidade” (98), signaling that motherhood,

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<sup>23</sup> Moure has commented on the spatial regulation of sexuality, noting that “[n]unha sociedade como a actual, que presume de permisiva con respecto a épocas previas — o cal é probabelmente falso — existen numerosos indicios de excesiva regulamentación da vida sexual. No deseño das nosas vivendas, sen irmos máis lonxe, suponse que hai un cuarto da casa onde cabe unha cama grande, desas que nas tendas de móbeis seguen a chamar “de matrimonio”; nos demais cuartos simplemente non caben as condutas sexuais: son cuartos para fillos e fillas, ou para pais e nais vellos, e de aí o sexo elimínase de forma tan sibilina como rotunda: roubándolles o espazo onde poñer unha cama grande” (*Queer-emos* 36).

<sup>24</sup> This motif is repeated at the end of the novel when Candela reveals that she is pregnant, presumably not with her husband’s child, but with Leandro’s, signaling the both continuation of the Balseiro line and its resistance to the model of the nuclear family.

as performance art, is a medium with great transformative potential. Through this choice of medium, Clara performs a bit of familial alchemy, honoring a bad father by becoming a good mother. Significantly, this honoring of the father—also manifested in Clara’s choice to name her son Leandro Balseiro in order to redeem her progenitor and, of course, in Clara’s desire to recreate his garden—is accompanied by an erasure of Clara’s mother. This symbolic matricide, I submit, is also a kind of creative forgetting driven by Clara’s homing desires.

Judith Halberstam writes

While Virginia Woolf’s famous line about women from *A Room of One’s Own*, “We think back through our mothers if we are women,” has been widely interpreted as the founding statement of a new aesthetic lineage that passes through the mother and not the father, the crucial point of the formulation is the conditional phrase [...] In fact, “if we are women” implies that if we do not think back through our mothers, then we are not women, and this broken line of thinking and unbeing of the woman unexpectedly offers a way out of the reproduction of woman as the other to man from one generation to the next. (125)

In light of Halberstam’s reading, it becomes clear that *A intervención* offers a conception of maternity that differs from Moure’s earlier novel *A xeira das árbores*, which is described by Helena Miguélez Carballeira as offering a

visión altamente esencializada da muller que na novela se constrúe como a muller-natureza, a muller-mai, a muller-sentimento, a muller-reduto da linguaxe e coñecemento primixenios, as máis delas tropos feministas esgotados noutras literaturas e custionados pola crítica. (“A escrita” 78)

By contrast, *A intervención* offers a repudiation of traditional maternity and reflects Clara’s desire to occupy the role of mother in a novel way.<sup>25</sup> This ideological shift is reflected on a

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<sup>25</sup> Given this, Clara is greatly irritated to hear her son imitating her complaining about household clutter: “«Ponme todo perdido este rapaz. Ten o cuarto feito unha leoneira, non sei como facer...»” (97), a comment through which Leandro portrays Clara as the very kind of mother she never intended to become. Clara laments “tantos anos de educación comprensiva e case libertaria para agora decatarse no momento decisivo de que a mamá tamén podía ser un axente represivo!” (97).

formal level by the fact that the character of Clara's mother all but vanishes from the narrative. Although as readers our sense of fairness may be offended by Clara's adoration of her father and the suppression of her mother, it seems that Clara's homing desires do not and cannot embrace a mother who remains inscribed in the paradigm of the nuclear family and who, in dozens of letters to her own father, never asks after the daughter she left behind (226). In some sense, then, if the novel celebrates anything about Susana, it is her creative failure and her omissions, which are ultimately decisive in breaking the cycle of transmission of hegemonic maternity, thus creating the conditions for the renovation of the family.

Through the processes of creative forgetting, family re-membering, and artistic maternity, Clara performs a political intervention by inventing a home that is less hierarchical, less rigid in its roles, and more conducive to happiness than the lost "paradise" of her infancy; in this sense, Moure's novel illustrates the twin home-making processes of restitution and healing referred to in the epigraph to this chapter: "Son os remendos que nos restitúen/ as cicatrices as que fan fogar" (Dávila 32). This is illustrated in a scene in which Clara, learning to ride a bicycle for the first time, is recast as the daughter, both in relation to Sampaio and to Leandro. It is Sampaio who performs the iconic parental function of holding up the bicycle as Clara begins to pedal: "Esa tarde eu, que non era unha pluma, sentía por vez primeira na vida a maxia do equilibrio no propio corpo sostida durante uns metros por Sampaio, que tampouco non era un rapaz" (111). Sampaio thus becomes the parents that Clara never had and, at the same time, the father he never managed to be for his own daughter, Ingrid. A further shifting or inversion of roles comes when, as Clara reports, Leandro "me viu en bicicleta polo camiño vello, seguindo a Sampaio soltándome na terceira marcha por unha baixada pendente dando berros de felicidade como unha nena e dicíndolle

nada máis albiscalo: «mira, Leandro, mírame, e agora... sen mans!» (106). Here, Clara is the child living the classic “Look! No hands!” moment with her son as the parent looking on; Clara observes, significantly, that such experiences prove that “nada está escrito” (111), that family and home are not definitively inscribed, but rather are stories that are iteratively told and retold. In this way, *A intervención* manifests Moure’s affection for mixing the modes of being and becoming, as illustrated by Clara’s affirmation that “Leandro e mais eu, Balseiros os dous, volvemos a ser quen sempre fomos: dúas criaturas igualmente a medio facer, cunha biografía que enleaba os seus pasados e que devecían por se construíren xuntos nos futuros respectivos” (122). By putting herself on the same level as Leandro—they are both works-in-progress—Clara reimagines her relationship with her adult son, abdicating the hierarchical advantage that comes with parenthood and thus creating a new family based on equality and the shared desire to keep building their identities, both individual and collective.

## Conclusion

Olga Novo has written that Moure combines “discursos do ecofeminismo, dos movementos anticapitalistas, antiglobalización” in order to construct “un edificio ideolóxico con vocación radical e libertaria, á vez contendor de múltiples contribucións e emanador de mensaxes liberadoras” (208).<sup>26</sup> Indeed, an abiding feature of her work is its contestatory and revolutionary tone: Moure’s denunciation of dominant paradigms—particularly as concerns the politics of gender, sexuality, ecology, and language—carries with it a call to *intervene*, an urging that readers, their consciousness newly raised, go forth and make the world a better

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<sup>26</sup> For a particularly insightful reading of the reception of Moure’s work in the context of Galician feminism, see Miguélez Carballeira’s 2007 essay “A escrita de Teresa Moure no contexto da narrativa feminista contemporánea”, in which the author argues that although Moure has been lauded for introducing new feminist ideas into the Galician cultural and literary scene, Moure in fact echoes many of the ideas expressed by feminist theorists of decades past, including Galician author and scholar María Xosé Queizán whose contributions have largely been ignored.



place. On Moure's view, the world—and the places, at whatever scale, we inhabit within it—is ever being made and remade, requiring constant reevaluation and action on the part of informed and engaged subjects if it is to become more just and equitable.

In a certain way, Moure's is a utopian project. As we know, a utopia is literally a *not-place*, a place that does not exist. In the context of this dissertation—a project about the experience of place—how are we to understand the experience of such non-existent places? Moure's novel takes up this question explicitly; Ingrid, concerned that Clara suffers from delusions of grandeur, observes that “o proxecto de Clara é algo... como se di *utopisch?* Utópico?” (146). This affirmation not only draws into question the feasibility of the project, but also its ability to produce the aesthetic and social effects that Clara imagines. Sampaio, for his part, suggests that the label “utopian,” imposed by power in order to negate the possibility of alternative models and ideas, can and should be reclaimed:

Todo pode acontecer [...] coido que o termo [utópico] non alude tanto á posibilidade lóxica de realización dun determinado proxecto, senón a ese sentimento que anega a quen realiza unha aposta que sae das lindes do que estaba marcado. Nese caso, *utópico* significaría fóra do rego, do imposto, do marcado. (147)

While in the end Ingrid is in some sense proved right—the atmosphere of bonhomie that accompanies the completion of the intervention is soon replaced by the sensation that “[a] realidade tendía o seu manto sobre nós e agora había que quitar as maletas do faiado e volver á vida de sempre” (250)—in another sense, Moure's novel points to the subject-internal and collective transformations brought about by the creative process, transformations that make a return to “a vida de sempre” impossible. In this way, Moure suggests that the creative process is itself a kind of “intervención política,” one that can—at least potentially—

contribute a world that is “ecoloxicamente sustentábel, pacífico, non competitivo, libre, xusto, creativo” (“Só coa vosa teimosía” 5), a world of homely homes.

### CHAPTER 3: PLACE, SILENCE, AND LOCAL MEMORY IN *TODO É SILENCIO* BY MANUEL RIVAS

“For ruins are the favourite habitat of ghosts.” ~Jo Labanyi

#### **Introduction: *Reter no silencio toda a vida vivida***

In Luísa Villalta’s short story “Máis alá das raíces” (2002), a teenaged girl in contemporary Galicia relates the experience of listening to an old man give a speech at a community center. The man, Xosé Barreiro, a *retornado*, affirms that he is there “principalmente para lembrar” (250) and these remembrances are interspersed with the girl’s first-person narration of her thoughts and reactions to the speech, as well as her description of the reactions of the other members of the audience. Through this narrative structure, Villalta shows that, more than simply recounting anecdotes from the distant past, Barreiro’s speech constitutes an attempt at recovery of communal memory and a bequeathing of that memory to the younger generation, as personified by the narrator. Barreiro, it seems, is the only person in the town who has ever spoken about the events of 1936; the narrator comments:

Eu non era quen de imaxinar todo aquilo. A miña avoa nunca quixera falar: volvía a vista cara a unha zona indeterminada da parede cada vez que alguén mencionaba o pasado. O home este, en cambio, falaba con toda franqueza, sen medo, sen ese temor tan intenso que embaciaba os ollos da miña avoa, capaz de reter no silencio toda a vida vivida, deixando apenas uns restos para continuar existindo. O meu avó din que estivo escondido no pozo e que padeceu dos pulmóns até a morte de tanto frío como pasou alí dentro. Eu non o coñecín. Non se falaba del moito tampouco. (261)

Thus the narrator reveals that hers is a town ruled by silence, a silence that seems to affect especially local history and local knowledge. When Barreiro speaks of the Estatuto de Autonomía of 1936, the narrator's confusion is notable: "perdín un pouco o fio [...] algo referente a un Estatuto de Autonomía que polo visto estiveran facendo. Pero iso non era máis recente?" (252), referring to the Estatuto de Autonomía de Galicia of 1981. By the end of the story, the narrator, who had criticized her town as a place where "os [...] camiños non levan a ningures," has a different criticism: the town is a knowledge vacuum. Wondering what happened to the book of Barreiros's poems that was left behind after the event, the narrator concludes "Non sei que fixeron do libro, como nunca se sabe aquí de tantas outras cousas" (264). Her town is one where no one knows, no one remembers, where knowledge disappears without a trace.

Pierre Nora has written that "Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, objects" (9). To understand local memory and local experience, perhaps we should attend to those sites that form part of the substrate of memory and to how, in Henri Lefebvre's terms, human imagination "overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (39), thus creating *lived space*, space imbued with meaning.<sup>27</sup> Nora draws the distinction between *milieux de mémoire*, cultures or environments that are propitious to living memory, and *lieux de mémoire*, sites that encase and curate memory and are "fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has

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<sup>27</sup> For a fascinating treatment of the relationship between place and memory, see: Basso, Keith. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1996.

barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it”  
(12).<sup>28</sup>

In this chapter, I read Manuel Rivas’s *Todo é silencio* (2010), exploring the spaces between *lieux de mémoire* and *milieux de mémoire*, spaces in which memory is not yet fully curated, codified into history, but where memory is not quite alive, either. These are spaces in which local memory and local knowledge are contested, where memory fails, where the past has been overwritten, effaced, perhaps, like a palimpsest, barely legible, recoverable only in part. They are spaces from which, like the narrator’s grandmother in Villalta’s story, people avert their gaze in order not to see, not to remember. In moving toward an examination of these in-between spaces, we may do well to consider these spaces as sites of haunting, as spaces inhabited by a spectral presence: these are spaces in which memory paradoxically both *is and is not there* (Derrida), places where the past has unfinished business. Acknowledging that these spaces exist runs counter to the adage that “what’s done is done,” and requires that we accept what Avery Gordon describes as the theoretical importance of the fact that life is complicated and personhood is complex, meaning that all people “remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others” (4). For Gordon, the study of haunting is not a sign of superstition or psychosis, but rather an essential component of the study of social life and therefore, I will add, of the study of local knowledge and memory. On this view, the study of literary fiction

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<sup>28</sup> Eugenia Romero (2012) and William J. Nichols (2006) have both studied the work of Manuel Rivas through Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire*. Romero’s analyzes textual elements of *En salvaxe compañía* such as the Pazo de Arán, the parish of Arán, the *santa compañía*, the parish cemetery—as well as the reader as an extra-textual site of memory—as *lieux de mémoire* that “create a space for criticism and review of Galicia’s history” (48). Nichols, for his part, argues that Rivas’s *O lapis do carpinteiro*, in addition to offering up oral tradition as antidote to the silencing of voices marginalized by historiography, “propone ciertos objetos físicos como «lieux de mémoire» que rescatan y no reprimen el pasado al ofrecer un espacio donde la memoria puede residir” (171). See chapter 4 for further discussion.

allows access to “other kinds of sociological information” (25); literary fiction grants access to “the ensemble of cultural imaginings, affective experiences, animated objects, marginal voices, narrative densities, and eccentric traces of power’s presence” (25).

My reading of *Todo é silencio* attends to those imaginings, those experiences, those animated objects out of which Rivas creates the psycho-social landscape of Brétéma, a contested space blighted not only by smuggling and drug trafficking, but by fear, silence, and the failure of memory.<sup>29</sup> In the first section, I discuss ways in which Rivas’s novel portrays the manipulation of local memory in Brétéma, connecting these phenomena to a culture of *caciquismo* and to what Rivas has called *capitalismo máximo*. The second section analyzes a specific site in Brétéma, the *escola de indianos*, as an interstitial, haunted space between history, memory, and forgetting, a place that indexes the truncation of progressive culture in Galicia that began with the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and came to sponsor, as is evidenced in Villalta’s story, a culture of silence that persisted throughout the Franco dictatorship (1939–75) and beyond.

### ***Capitalismo máximo* and local memory**

As a coastal village, Brétéma is defined by the sea, and familiarity with the sea is an important domain of local knowledge. The fact that Lucho Malpica, for example, is able to earn his living from the sea is due to his intimate knowledge of the sea and the coastline, a knowledge that extends even to the unseen geography that lies beneath the sea’s surface. Lucho’s son, Fins, describes his father’s knowledge this way “Meu pai sabe os nomes de todas esas pedras [...] as que se ven e as que non se ven” (10). But the importance of this

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<sup>29</sup> In later editions of the novel, “Brétéma” has been changed to “Noitía” in order to avoid conflict with author Marina Mayoral, who has also set works in a fictional space known as Brétéma. As I am working with a first edition of Rivas’s text, I use “Brétéma” throughout this chapter.

local knowledge is contested, and Fins's friend Brinco advocates a break with this tradition:

“Teu pai será un bo mariñeiro, non o nego. Pero vas ver como se pesca de verdade” (10).

Here Brinco is referring to the practice of blast fishing, in which dynamite is used to kill fish en masse, after which they can easily be collected. Brinco regards as miraculous the idea that the dynamite blast creates a “marca de medo” (10), a zone of fear to which fish will not return, which has been defined by the violence that has taken place there.<sup>30</sup> In this, one of the first scenes of the novel, Rivas creates an association that links the denial of local knowledge with violence and fear. Indeed, as the novel progresses, Brétema comes to bear a “marca de medo”; if, as Avery Gordon writes “Haunting always harbors the violence, the *witchcraft* and *denial* that made it” (207), Brétema from the novel's outset, is a site of haunting.

If young Brinco's views on blast fishing reveal a fascination with the fear that is produced by the overt threat of violence and the marking of territory, the rhetoric of Mariscal and Rumbo, members of the older generation, has a different sort of tone; theirs is a discourse that seeks to overwrite or rewrite tradition, emphasizing the felicity of Brétema's coastal location: “O mar é unha mina... Dá de todo. E sen unha pada de esterco! Non fai falta esterco, como a puta terra” (42). Here the sea is praised, it is a goldmine, while the land is denigrated, devalued and hated for the work it demands.<sup>31</sup> Through this rhetoric, Rumbo and Mariscal create an alternative coastal reality that elides the fact that fishing, barnacle harvesting, and other legal maritime occupations, are hard ways to make a living, while at the same time tacitly normalizing smuggling and laying the groundwork for a new local

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<sup>30</sup> In *Sempre en Galiza*, Castelao praises fish and fishermen, while decrying blast fishing: “A pesca era un traballo nobre e xeneroso. Por algo Xesús de Nazaret escolleu, para seus apóstolos, a doce mariñeiros. Mais agora péscase con dinamita” (136).

<sup>31</sup> See Thompson 2009 on the trope of the Galician land as female.

tradition, one that Rivas calls “o capitalismo máximo,” an ethic that embraces wealth while seeking to obscure its source.<sup>32</sup>

In the first part of the novel, the only voices that counter this ethic are those of Fins’s parents, Lucho and Amparo. As we have already seen, Rivas sets up Fins’s father as a metonym of the working fisherman. The opposition between legitimate work and *capitalismo máximo* is further elaborated in a scene in which Lucho sees the 10,000 peseta note that Fins has left on the kitchen table. When Fins tells his father he earned the money at his part-time job cleaning storage tanks, Lucho cries foul and demands to know where the money really came from, to which Fins replies with silence. Lucho declares, “A peor mentira é o silencio” (76) and Fins eventually admits that he earned the money unloading contraband tobacco. Lucho reacts with resentment: “Máis do que se pode gañar un pelexando co mar unha puta semana” (76). Here Lucho stands in opposition to Mariscal by refusing to let the arduousness of his traditional work be forgotten or made to seem ridiculous—as Mariscal does when, later in the novel, he proclaims “Mentres se traballa, non se gaña diñeiro” (55). In another sense, Lucho and Amparo oppose Mariscal by refusing to accept Fins’s silence and by not remaining silent themselves. By sharing what they know about Mariscal’s past with Fins, Lucho and Amparo share local knowledge that does not exist in any archive, standing against the silence and secrecy that is at the heart of Mariscal’s code. Fins’s parents, upon learning that he is becoming involved with Mariscal’s operations, understand that the contagion of silence has begun to reach Fins, that the way to inoculate him is to bring Mariscal out of the

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<sup>32</sup> In magical capitalism, the source of capital is a topic studiously to be avoided. But, as Carmen Avendaño is quoted as saying in a 1994 *El País* article, “En Villagarcía y en Cambados el dinero no cae del cielo” (González); thus expressing her indignation that the government chose to prosecute the Oubiña family only on tax irregularities while apparently not investigating the source of the Oubiña family’s wealth. Laureano Oubiña was eventually convicted of drug trafficking and spent 11 years in prison.



shadows. Indeed, shadow imagery, which is deployed throughout the novel, is important in this scene. When describing a scandal from Mariscal's seminary days, Lucho states "Todo iso quedou e quedará para sempre na sombra. Como o que veu despois" (78), referring to Mariscal's time in prison for his role in the illegal transport of people into France. Moments later, as Lucho tries to tune the radio, the narrator describes A de Meus (a fishing village that forms part of Brétema) as "un lugar de sombra," a clear double entendre that refers both to radio signals and to the darkness and secrecy that imposes itself on the town. At least initially, then, Lucho and Amparo represent the continuation of tradition and the passing on of local knowledge from one generation to the next, planting in Fins the seed of what will become his desire to undo Mariscal.

In this context, the grim fates of Lucho and Amparo represent Brétema's loss of tradition and memory. Lucho, seduced by the allure of *capitalismo máximo*, is killed in a blast fishing accident, after which Amparo becomes amnesiac. In contrast with her appearance in the first part of the book where she advocated for memory and against silence, the amnesia in which we find her immersed during the second half of the book reveals that Amparo has overdubbed her memories, altering her view of history and recasting her relationship with Brétema. In a general sense, Amparo allows us a window into the subjective and contingent processes by which places are created and experienced at the individual level; for her, the place where she lived with her husband and raised her son is now nothing more to her than a town she visited once to buy thread and where she was caught in a rainstorm. By disassociating herself from Brétema, Amparo is in some sense able to take a critical stance toward the town, as evidenced by the fact that her recollection of the afternoon she spent there makes the place sound like a kind of hell: "Ía moita, moita calor. O sitio estaba a arder

por dentro, como o tillar das árbores” (110). By erasing the town, though, Amparo has also nearly erased her family “Agora, Fins, para ela, é a lembranza dunha romaxe. Nada máis. E Lucho Malpica un neno que aínda non naceu” (111); her doctor explains that “lembrar doe, en moitos casos” (113) and that, in Amparo’s case, the act of remembering pushed her past a threshold of pain and that her memory, “para sobrevivir, descartou ese anaco que danaba todo” (113). Through this process of editing her memories, Amparo converts her deeply painful associations with the Brétema into something new, a casual experience she had one afternoon that nevertheless maintains certain nightmarish qualities that bear the trace of the tumult that she actually lived there. Amparo’s mind has performed an act of erasure and reorganization, but also, her status as a disabled person means that she has been erased (and removed) from the town; significantly, after we learn of Amparo’s amnesia, the novel never returns to her again; she has been erased from the social life of town, and, on a narrative level, has ceased to matter for the advancement of the story. Amparo’s experience of space is now played out on the level of minutiae, the patterns of her tatting and needlework become her maps. It is in this world where she once again becomes graceful, “cos dedos máis lizgairos que nunca” (112), where she becomes young again, “risoña con quen a arrodeaban” (112). Her experience is seamless, so complete is her erasure of her loss that she doesn’t experience it as loss at all: “Ela está convencida de lembrarse de todo” (112).

If Amparo escapes Brétema and refashions her system of psycho-social coordinates through amnesia, Mariscal, ever an enemy of historical accuracy, refashions himself in the eyes of Brétema through *escamotage*, theatre and sleight of hand. He is cloaked in shadow, and the true nature of his acts remains obscure. Mariscal is never directly associated with violence, and his role in many of the most sinister things that happen in Brétema, such as the

death of his wife, Guadalupe, remains the stuff of suspicion. As the detective Mara Doval says, “Pensem os que pensem, non hai xeito de relacionar a Mariscal con esa morte” (207). This ghostly quality, this sense that Mariscal cannot be pinned down, that he at once is and is not there is aestheticized in the novel, for example by the fact that Mariscal dresses all in white, sometimes in a Panama hat, and is never seen without white gloves. With this bit of sartorial self-fashioning, Mariscal, despite never having been to America, appropriates the image of the *indiano* and in effect falsifies the record, writing himself a bogus entry in the annals of local history and, once again, obscuring the origins of his wealth. Ironically, Mariscal assumes the identity of an *indiano* while undermining the socially progressive ideas held by many legitimate *indianos*, a point to which I return in the next section. Mariscal as a false *americano* offers a counterpoint to other *indianos* in Rivas’s fiction, such as Daniel da Barca in *O lapis do carpinteiro*, who represents, in Thompson’s formulation, the “proxecto aberto, creativo e cosmopolita” of the Galician left during the Second Republic (155). By viewing these two examples of *indianos* side by side, we reveal that Mariscal is not only shadowy, but a shadow, a hollow simulacrum of Rivas’s liberal *retornado*.<sup>33</sup>

To understand Mariscal’s success in creating an alternative Brétema based on *capitalismo máximo*, in implicating the entire town in his operation, and in doing what a detective in the novel, Mara Doval, describes as “[mercar] as vontades da xente” (199), it is useful to refer to conceptions of political citizenship under a system of *caciquismo* like that which traditionally existed in Galicia. Miguel-Anxo Murado, in his treatment of the subject, points to political indifference as a central characteristic of Galician society, being careful to

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<sup>33</sup> As a small town *cacique*, though, Mariscal isn’t shadowy enough for the tastes of the international bosses with whom he has begun to do business. One of Mariscal’s contacts in the international mafia, Fabio, reports that the *capo* believes that Mariscal is too exposed: “Iso dixo. E engadiu algo que me impresionou. Primeiro: O poder necesita sombra. E segundo: non hai mellor sombra que a do poder” (167).

point out that, far from being an ethnic trait of the Galician people as it is sometimes imagined, this indifference is structural, the result of an entrenched way of being that has existed in Galicia for centuries (152). Political indifference, clearly dangerous in itself, becomes more so when coupled with loyalty to a politician or local leader who is seen as a “proveedor” (161) or a “conseguidor” (173). Murado argues that Galician public life has long been characterized by just this combination; for the average citizen, the question of what is best for society, and how best to achieve those social goals, either does not exist or is secondary to her individual material concerns. In his analysis, Murado considers that for the rural dweller, *caciquismo* is both “su maldición y su única forma de participación política” (157), a practice that is deeply undemocratic (or as Murado calls it “ademocrática”) and that serves to foreclose dissenting ideas and political pluralism while providing a modicum of access to power, if only by proxy. Guy Debord, following La Boétie’s *Discours sur la servitude volontaire*, points to this problem of complicity stating: “the tyrant’s power will be considerably reinforced by the concentric circles of individuals who believe, rightly or wrongly, that it is in their interests to support it” (61).

In this context, Mariscal can be seen as a provider whose control over the town is tolerated, even justified, by his ability to bring in money under the nose of the taxman. Murado explains that in nineteenth-century Galicia, the process of *desamortización* that was being undertaken throughout Spain led to the requirement that people who worked the land contribute money directly to the state in the form of taxes, instead of the in-kind tributes they had been paying under the previous system. Murado affirms that “lo que los campesinos odiaban eran precisamente las contribuciones directas al Estado” (155). Rivas’s Mariscal crafts a rhetoric that seizes on this anti-tax sentiment, bringing it forward into the twentieth

century and tying it together with a distrust of the banking system. Mariscal casts Brétema's prosperity as the result of the enterprising nature of the townspeople, and ridicules the notion that the state or the banks should profit from their industriousness: "Os bancos prestan paraugas no verán. Entón hai xente que fai uns paraugas caralludos pola súa conta. E os bancos interésanse. E Facenda interésase" (186). What Mariscal claims to want for Brétema is freedom, "Liberdade, si, para crear riqueza. Liberdade para que nos deixen gañar a vida coas nosas propias mans. Como sempre fixemos!" (183). Mariscal here appropriates the long-standing anti-centralist rhetoric that holds that the centralized Spanish state is responsible for undermining Galician society and its economy, casting himself as one of what Alfonso Rodríguez Castelao, the Galician artist and intellectual, described as "true" caciques, those benevolent individuals who, living "a carón do pobo," defend the locals against the state (112-16).<sup>34</sup> Mariscal claims that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the town (182), emphasizing that he is "apolítico," that he lacks any party affiliation, or that his "único partido é Brétema" (185). It is clear, however, that, in spite of his rhetoric, his use of the first-person plural, and his attempts to portray himself as an advocate for Brétema who, out of duty, leads the townspeople in creating a better town, free from the abuses of the state, Mariscal mostly seeks to consolidate power and economic advantage for himself.

Castelao, writing in 1937, states that "O caciquismo deixará de eistir cando se lexisle para Galiza e os labregos se sintan amparados pol-a Lei, sen medo â Xusticia" (114). Rivas's novel, which begins in the late Francoist period, some thirty years after Castelao's writing, portrays a political situation in which, far from enjoying protection under the law, many Galicians are subject not only to the dictatorship, but also to the continued hegemonic

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<sup>34</sup> This is in opposition to the *mandóns* (bosses) who are essentially the local executors of centralized state power.

practices of *caciquismo* that the dictatorship engenders.<sup>35</sup> In a social and political system where civil society, pluralism, and individual freedoms are severely undermined, Brétéma's degree of collaboration with Mariscal's organization is perhaps understandable, especially when we consider that that collaboration is given in exchange for local protection and much needed income. John P. Thompson, in his analyses of Galician novels that treat the Civil War and the dictatorship, points out that this group submissiveness, often cited (along with indifference, as I mention above) as an essential Galician character trait, was in fact in retreat during the years prior to the Civil War, especially during the Second Republic (1931–36), a period during which progressive social projects of all kinds were taking hold throughout rural Galicia. This counter-hegemonic transformation demonstrates Raymond Williams's view that hegemony is a process that "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own" (*Marxism* 112). While many of the works that Thompson analyzes in his book *As novelas da memoria* (including Rivas's own *O lapis do carpinteiro*) portray this progressive period from within as a vital, exciting period of resistance and change in Galicia, a period that is tragically brought to an end by the Civil War, *Todo é silencio* portrays the aftermath of that truncation and of the subsequent recreation and modification of old systems of oppression. Brétéma, as its name suggests, is shrouded in a fog, a fog of un-remembering that renders Galicia's relatively recent progressive past invisible. In this sense, the narrative world of *Todo é silencio* resembles what Thompson, in his discussion of *Como levar un morto* (2001) by Xesús Rábade and *A fraga dos paxaros salvaxes* (1985) by Xosé Fernández Ferreiro, describes as a dehistoricized society populated by "individuos desorientados,

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<sup>35</sup> Thompson has pointed to the enduring existence of what he calls a situation of "caciquismo e alienación" (*As novelas* 167) in parts of rural Galicia.

pasivos e despolitizados” living in a social milieu in which “os proxectos colectivos desarticúlanse, e sen unha visión cara ao futuro nutrida dos coñecementos do pasado, o presente perde a súa capacidade de crear espazos de praxe” (38). The village of Brétema, then, is a depuration of the darker aspects of Galicia under Franco and bears little resemblance to the activist Galicia of the 1970s that Rivas has called “una sociedade solidaria.” Brétema is a village locked in an eternal present where Rivas’s desire, expressed in his 2009 speech entitled *A boca da literatura*, to “facer o amor co futuro, mais tamén co pasado, cando ese pasado é liberador e nos abastece de faíscas de esperanza” (24) seems to have no place.<sup>36</sup> It is a place where control over local memory goes to the highest bidder.

### **The escola de indianos**

In this section, I will analyze the *escola de indianos* as a site of haunting, of what Gordon calls “the clamoring return of [that which has been] reduced to a delicate social experience struggling, even unaware, with its shadowy but exigent presence” (201) or what Patricia Williams calls “a space that is filled in by a meandering stream of unguided hopes, dreams, fantasies, fears, recollections” (qtd. in Gordon 207). I argue that despite the fact that Brétema, as we saw in the last section, is no longer a *milieu de mémoire*, a place with a habit of remembering, the village still bears traces of local memory and knowledge, traces that are concentrated in the *escola*. Thus, Rivas’s return to the *escola* at various points in the

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<sup>36</sup> Rivas’s attributes the expression “facer o amor co futuro” to American poet and rocker Patti Smith: “Nunha das súas cancións, Patti Smith, cantante rock e boa poeta, chama a facer o amor co futuro (debería traducir por “follar co futuro”, mais non o vou dicir)” (*A boca* 24). This is a rather strange adaptation of Patti Smith’s lyric from “Babelogue”, a track on the 1978 album *Easter*: “I haven’t fucked much with the past but I’ve fucked plenty with the future”, and results in a significant distortion of Smith’s words. In colloquial American English, “to fuck with” means to disturb something that is at rest, to play mind games with someone, or to implicate oneself in another’s business. I will venture that Rivas did not have these meanings in mind when he spoke of “facer o amor co futuro.” That notwithstanding, I return to Rivas’s words at various points throughout this dissertation, as I find them evocative of a positive, committed, and amorous approach to the future. It may be, however, that when Rivas speaks of the need to take cultural tradition and “anovale, ensanchala, transgredila” (*A boca* 24), Smith’s notion of fucking with the past is indeed appropriate.

narration signifies a collective need to “giv[e] speech back to the ghost[s]” (Derrida 221) of the past, a process which, owing to the tensions and failures inherent in the recovery of memory, renders the *escola* a site of what Rábade Villar has paradoxically called “restitución despouída” (*Fogar* 177).

One one level, the ruins of the *escola de indianos* stand as a reminder of the efforts of Galician migrant communities who, by deploying the economic and ideological capital gained in the Americas, sought to influence what kind of place Galicia would become by establishing schools that would bring literacy, practical skills, and cosmopolitan values back to their home regions (Costa Rico 15). Even more specifically, the *Unión Americana de Fillos de Brétema* represents a type of *asociacionismo* that Xosé M. Núñez Seixas identifies as *microterritorial*, in which emigrants from the same village or town would form organizations, often with the intent of planning and funding projects for the places they left behind. Núñez Seixas points out the importance of local identity for these emigrants, and cites the Galician doctor A. Anido who, writing in 1898, recognized the pride of place held by the “patria chica”: “Reconocemos la conveniencia de declararnos hijos de la patria grande [...] pero el corazón nos vende; el primer impulso es para la patria pequeña. Y es que allí están la casa donde nacimos y la calle donde, siendo niños, hemos jugado con el desenfado propio de los pocos años” (83). Notwithstanding such nostalgic framings, the progressive nature of associationist projects—like that of the *fillos de Brétema*—demonstrates how love of place can play a part in the broader political project of “facer o amor co futuro” and how local identity can be inscribed within a framework of social activism that operates across



borders and at various geographic scales.<sup>37</sup>

On another level, though, Rivas uses the *escola de indianos* to show how past dreams of the future haunt the present as failures and ruins. If Rábade Villar has noted Rosalía de Castro's use of "microtoponimia na construción de lugares que non adoita cantar dende a celebración, senón dende a perda" (*Fogar* 177), Rivas's *escola* offers a microgeography of loss and oblivion. When as readers we first see the school from the point of view of the four teenaged protagonists exploring it, however, the school is decontextualized, almost prehistoric. The front wall of the schoolroom is described as "descolorida como pinturas rupestres" (28) and the furniture and collections that once filled the school are described as having burned "[...] noutro tempo, nun período tamén arcaico, fóra do tempo, que os maiores chamaban Guerra" (28). For these characters, born in the 1950s (as for Luísa Villalta's narrator in "Máis alá das raíces"), the Civil War and the other events of the first half of the twentieth century may as well have taken place in Paleolithic times. Significantly, though, the school that Rivas depicts, while in ruins, still refuses to fall, it is "Unha desas ruínas que queren esboroarse e non o conseguen, e ás que as hedras que cobren os muros non as fenden, senón que as vendan" (26), alluding perhaps to the latent viability of progressive social projects. Nature, in the form of climbing ivy, rather than destroying the building, seems to be holding it in trust for the future, and although it is in disrepair, the building's very design still speaks to the cosmopolitan values that brought it into being; its floor is a map of the world in relief that allowed each student to sit "nun recanto do mapamundi. E movíase ao longo dos

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<sup>37</sup> The notion of a "patria pequena" brings to mind Ruben Darío's "Retorno": "Si pequeña es la patria, uno grande la sueña/ Mis ilusiones, y mis deseos, y mis/ esperanzas, me dicen que no hay patria pequeña" (553). By deploying a contrast between geographic smallness and psychic grandeur, Darío's verses present a paradox: the *patria pequena* is always large in the eyes of the subject who views it through the lens of future-oriented affect—rendered here as *ilusión*, *deseo*, and *esperanza*.

anos, de tal xeito que cando rematase podía dicir que era un cidadán do mundo” (26), a geographic movement which the young lovers Leda (Nove Lúas) and Fins re-enact:

—Onde estás, Fins?  
—Na Antártida. E ti?  
—Eu estou na Polinesia.  
—Estás ben lonxe! (59)

This enactment serves both to connect Leda and Fins to the students of the past, and as a preamble to the their microgeographic movement toward one another, thus connecting the cosmopolitan with the erotic: “Achegábanse. Encontráronse. Tócanse [...] Nove Lúas percorre cos dedos o mapa do rostro de Fins Malpica” (60). If the map that Mariscal uses to plan shipments of contraband, a secret map hidden under the surface of the pool table in his headquarters, the Ultramar, exemplifies that saying that “La géographie, ça sert, d’abord, à faire la guerre” (Lacoste), perhaps Fins and Leda have discovered that geography also serves “à faire l’amour”.

By connecting Fins and Leda to the students of the past, Rivas points to possibility of addressing the failure of historical memory his generation and the previous one experienced during the dictatorship, a period characterized by “una cultura oficial oscurantista que sistematicamente les escamoteó el conocimiento del pasado cultural gallego y de las vicisitudes socioeconómicas y políticas por las que había pasado Galicia” (Tarrío Varela 149). According to Rivas, in 1950’s Galicia “o que dominaba era un silencio mudo e un ambiente cultural desmemoriado, ruín e hostil” (*A boca* 18). The notion of a *silencio mudo* is drawn from Rosalía de Castro:

[...]Aquelas risas sin fin,  
aquele brincar sin dolor,  
aquela louca alegría,  
¿Por qué acabou?

Aqueles doces cantares,  
aquelas falas d'amor,  
aquelas noites serenas,  
¿Por qué non son?

Aquel vibrar sonoro  
das cordas da arpa i os sons  
da guitarra malencónica,  
¿quen os levou?

Todo é silencio mudo,  
soidá, delor,  
ond' outro tempo a dicha  
sola reinou [...] (188)

This *silencio mudo* runs throughout the novel and is often associated with the *escola*, as we will see. By taking up the poetics of the *silencio mudo*, Rivas replicates what Rábade Villar calls the productive “tensión entre o que se nomea e o que é radicalmente alleo á denominación” (*Fogar* 177) that is so often present in Castro’s oeuvre. In the poem, *o silencio mudo* supplants the sounds of laughter, love, and music associated with an earlier time, leaving the poetic voice behind as a trace, a witness to lost plenitude whose discourse is fractured by interrogatives, a poetic strategy that works to resist “calquera vía rápida de lexitimación dos suxeitos afectados pola desposesión” and thus offers “testemuño real do que supón ser un desposuído” (*Fogar* 178). In the novel, when Leda, inside the ruins of the school, opens a book out of idle curiosity (“abriuno por abrir”) and discovers Castro’s poem, she enters a space inhabited by a voice that hails her from the past. As Leda reads, the educational project of the *Fillos de Brétema* emerges, albeit fleetingly, from the school’s ruined archive; like the town’s collective memory, the book is shot through with erasures, “ten sucos de piollos” that threaten the recovery of the text. Even so, Leda wants to pass the text along to Fins, and asks him to copy the poem on the school’s ancient typewriter as she reads. When Fins protests that he doesn’t have any paper, Leda knows that it doesn’t matter;

the important thing is the practice of memory, the passing along from one to another, dredging the neural canals through which memory flows, a process that Rivas, following Edward Casey, calls “lembrar relembrando” (*A boca* 10–11).<sup>38</sup> Leda seems to intuitively trust that the text has something to say, even if she does not understand it; if the text reproduces the *seseo* of coastal Galicia (“todo é silencio”), Leda affirms “Por algo será” (61). That sibilant is a socio-phonetic commentary, an echo of local linguistic practice that stands to remind Leda of where she is from, who her people are, and what their voices sound like. Ironically, then, while Rosalía’s poem laments the reign of silence, the poem itself serves symbolically to counter the silence in which Brétima is submerged.

The *escola de indianos*, then, is a space haunted by literature, where the past speaks to Leda and Fins through Castro’s poem. This is a narrative manifestation of Rivas’s argument in *A boca da literatura* that hegemonic silence may be countered by accessing the nearly mythical power of literature to redeem humanity in its darkest moments, to plant itself and grow in the darkest of crevices: “As verbas son sobreviventes que agroman malferidas, reticentes e resentidas polas fendas das ruínas” (*A boca* 19). But far from being a utopian space dedicated to the recovery of memory and collective identity, the *escola de indianos* is a contested, heterotopic space (Foucault) where numerous discourses flow together and are superimposed. Leda, who, as we have just seen, is at first associated with remembering or rediscovering the knowledge hidden in the school, becomes, as the novel progresses, an advocate for forgetting; if Castro’s poem speaks words that “agroman malferidas,” Leda becomes an agent of their *eradication*. Leda’s transformation parallels bipartite temporal structure of the novel (which in some sense parallels the temporal structure of Castro’s

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<sup>38</sup> In this context, it is interesting to note that the term “hodology” applies not only to the study of footpaths, but also to the study of neural pathways.

poem): the first third of the book is called “O silencio amigo” and corresponds to the main characters’ teenage years (“aquele brincar sin dolor”), while the remainder of the narration, “O silencio mudo,” takes place more than a decade later, a time of “soidá, dolor” in which Brétéma is firmly gripped by hegemony of silence.<sup>39</sup>

When, early in the second part of the novel, Leda and Fins meet again in the school, the building has become, somewhat paradoxically, more of a ruin but also more full of light: “O buraco do teito agrandara e no mapa do chan reducíranse as zonas de penumbra” (122). This imagery counters the notion that the past necessarily falls into obscurity; the relationship between walls held together by ivy and the roof that, with time, recedes into nothingness is exactly the kind of relationship “between what *assembles and joins* and what is gaping, detouring, and haunting” (Gordon 27, emphasis in original) that Gordon believes literature can illuminate. Indeed, Leda and Fins’s different reactions to the space point to the plurality of experiences a given space can engender. Fins focuses on the light, observing that “Vese mellor. Tes as unllas pintadas de negro. Estás no Océano” (122). Fins thus begins to reenact the game they played as teenagers, fixing Leda’s coordinates on the map, a game that, along with the rest of his youth in Brétéma, is etched in Fins’s memory: “Lembreime de ti, de todo, máis do que podes imaxinar” (122). Fins, then, is a practitioner of memory; he is now a detective, and as such, his *métier* consists in bringing the past into the light, in giving back speech to the ghosts of the past (Derrida’s formulation). But Leda’s riposte is a movement back into darkness and forgetting: Leda “retrocede até apoiarse na mesa dun pupitre, de novo na penumbra” and tells Fins “Pois eu non. Eu aprendín a esquecer. Cada día e cada hora. Son unha experta en esquecementos” (122).

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<sup>39</sup> Perhaps ironically, the first section of the book takes place in the late Francoist period, while the second section takes place in democratic Spain.

The school is thus a site of clandestine encounters where discourses of memory and forgetting flow together, compete, and cancel each other out. Returning to the first section of the novel, when the group of teenagers first explore the dilapidated school, we see that Mariscal and his collaborators have a discourse of their own through which they seek to define the site. The teenagers find the building filled with cases of contraband whiskey; the site has become one of Mariscal's many depots. The school's identity as a symbol of social progress has been overwritten as the school is literally occupied by Mariscal's smuggling operation. Rumbo forbids the teenagers to go there, and Mariscal warns them away from the school: "Ese lugar está... endemoñado. Sempre o estuvo!" (54). On a first reading, these warnings and prohibitions seem mundane, a case of adults trying to keep kids out of trouble, to curb their "louca alegría". On another level, though, the word "endemoñado" points to the school as a site of haunting, a place where "time is out of joint," where the ghost is none other than the projects of the past that seek restitution, to be recognized and thus saved from oblivion (Derrida 22–3). The school, then, is a site in which the structure of time seems to be altered, folded in on itself in a way that threatens to undo the illusion that the present is free, unmoored from any past or future time. Gordon, following Eagleton, theorizes the ghost as that which "registers the actual 'degraded present' in which we are inextricably and historically entangled *and* the longing for the arrival of a future" (207); in steering the teenagers away from the school, the adults seek to exorcise the town's geography of this demon that registers the "degraded present," to erase it or push it back into obscurity. For Mariscal, controlling the building that once housed the school means keeping the site from becoming a space where memory can take root (Nora), thus promoting the collective amnesia that keeps him firmly in control of Brétima. Amnesia is Mariscal's ally, a fact he attempts to

obfuscate with platitudes such as “o silencio do que sabe é unha substracción para a humanidade” (91). If, as Thompson points out, a specter is “unha memoria fragmentada e marxinada do saber colectivo en procura de un *lieu de mémoire* para ser inscrita na Historia” (69), Mariscal’s true project is to keep the spirit of progress that haunts the school in a state of *desarraigo*, rootless and fragmentary and thus invisible to History. In an inversion of the notion of the *foraxido*, a criminal who flees town to escape justice, Mariscal is a criminal who manipulates the town so that justice, the ghost’s desideratum, is kept at bay.

Part of this manipulation, as I have mentioned, involves Mariscal’s occupation of the school, an occupation that goes beyond the physical. When Mariscal discovers the teenagers exploring the *escola*, Mariscal’s words change the structure of the youths’ memory of being in the school, his discourse on secrecy and silence threatens to overwrite their first-hand sensory experience of the school. Mariscal proclaims “*Os habent, et non loquentur. Teñen boca e non falan. Se aprendedes isto, tendes media vida gañada*” (31). Like Debord’s notion of “spectacular discourse” Mariscal’s words leave no room for reply and means the death of conversation and therefore of logic, for “logic was only socially constructed through dialogue” (Debord 29). Mariscal’s is a discourse of erasure that seeks to relegate into non-existence what the teenagers may have seen or experienced inside the school: “Ben, tropa... aquí non pasou nada. Non oístes nada. Non vistes nada” (31). Through his negation of the teenagers’ own experience, Mariscal attempts to interfere with the very cognitive machinery of memory making. This will to authority on Mariscal’s part produces here and throughout the novel a tension over what we might call the “question of Brétéma,” the question of who decides what kind of place Brétéma will be, whether a plurality of views and experiences will flow together to form a town that each subject can regard as her own, or whether, by contrast,

the town will be populated by people who “Teñen ollos e non ven... Teñen oído e non oen” (31), morphologically human but stripped of all subjectivity and therefore of the ability to create truly lived space through the superposition of their memories and their imaginings upon the town (Lefebvre).

The contrast between freedom and total dehumanization, however, is a perhaps a false dichotomy; for as much as it portrays a town in which freedoms are circumscribed, Rivas’s novel is not a portrait of a post-human dystopia, but rather of case study of the banal yet socially paralyzing effects of hegemony. If, as I have suggested, the *escola* is a site that serves as a metaphor for social and ideological fault lines that run through Brétema, the character of Chelín, who in the second part of the novel takes up residence in the school, offers insight into how those fractures are lived and experienced at the level of the individual. Chelín, a heroin addict and synecdoche of the *xeración perdida* that fell victim to Galicia’s drug tide (sometimes called the *mareia branca*, especially in reference to cocaine) of the 1980s, is privileged as one of the only first-person narrators in the novel; his voice issues from within the *escola de indianos*, which he describes as “[...] o meu sitio. O meu zulo” (117).<sup>40</sup> Through this repetition of the possessive, Chelín expresses the extent to which he identifies with the school and views it as a comfortable, homely home. But given that the site

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<sup>40</sup> A 2003 Library of Congress report indicates that Galician organizations working with Colombian cartels to distribute cocaine in Spain and throughout Europe were allowed to keep one half of each shipment for their own distribution (Berry 140), which may help to explain the severity of the drug crisis in Galicia. The term *mareia branca* was also used after the Prestige oil spill of 2002, this time with a positive connotation, to refer to the waves of volunteers dressed in white haz-mat suits who came to clean up the *mareia negra*. Both phenomena point to the importance of the sea to Galician social reality. In light of this, the theme of “coming ashore” may be an interesting topic for further research. Aside from Rivas’s own deployment of the trope in *Todo é silencio* (oranges) and *O lapis do carpinteiro* (accordions), washing ashore figures in recent cultural products such as Domingo Villar’s *A praia dos afogados* (2009), Rosa Aneiros’s *Veume visitar o mar* (2004), Ramón y José Manuel Trigo’s graphic novel *O burato do inferno* (2010) and the television series *Matalobos* (2009–2013). Miguel Anxo Murado, for his part, points out that “Desde los «restos del apóstol» hasta el *Prestige*, a Galicia casi todo le ha llegado por el mar” (*Otra idea* 22), an idea exemplified by Jessica Sabín’s poem “Conxuro da castaña”, an apostrophe to the chestnut in which the poet describes the former Galician staple as dethroned by the potato, a “ruín froito subterráneo/ que chegou polo mar” (“Conxuro” n.pag.).



is associated with Mariscal's discourse of anesthesia and silence, Chelín's comfort there reveals the extent to which he has assimilated Mariscal's rhetoric and come to imagine the school in a manner wholly divorced from the values it originally represented. So convinced is he of the legitimacy of his tenure that when Fins enters the school, Chelín feels licensed to ridicule him as an outsider, noting that his footfalls break the silence, rousing the bats that hang from the ceiling: "Levan meses aí, pendurados, remoendo a sombra, e xusto agora espertan. Oír si que oen, digo eu, e ese, o Malpica, xa perdeu o xeito de pisar. Quen ía pensar que acabaría de feo. Vai batendo en todos os accidentes xeográficos. Comigo están en paz. *Eu son de aquí*" (117, emphasis mine). In contrast to the notion that I advance in Chapter 1 of places as emergent, dynamic phenomena whose ontological status is best described not in terms of *being* but rather of *becoming*, here Chelín's criticism of Fins reflects a closed, static, and proprietary view of the school and, by extension, of Brétema. For example, when Chelín describes Fin's way of walking: "xa perdeu o xeito de pisar," by using the definite determiner "o," he ratifies the notion that there is but one way of walking, one way of being in Brétema. For Chelín, the town has stayed the same, but Fins has changed; he has become alien, "feo," clumsy, he makes noise and disturbs the peace that Chelín has created for himself through acquiescence to the local status quo. Far from seeing this capitulation as a defeat, Chelín celebrates himself as an authentic *fillo de Brétema*, proclaiming "eu son de aquí". Moreover, Chelín takes Fins's hodological incompetence, his failure to wend his way gracefully around the geographic features that rise from the school's floor, as proof that Fins, in spite of being a Brétema native, has been denatured by his time away, rendered foreign. In this way, he invokes a discourse of belonging that is "locals only," exclusionary in nature, an assertion that others do not belong.

While I argue earlier in this chapter that the map built into the *escola* is a representation of the open, cosmopolitan project of the *indianos*, Chelín's alternative conception of the map provides a stark illustration of the ways in which the meaning of places is often contested, always subject to revision, and how the relative material stability and continuity of physical sites contrasts with the mutability of the ideologies with which those sites are freighted. Chelín's essentialist attitude of *it was ever thus* is a willful ofuscation of this mutability, and plays into the collective anesthesia (literally, the lack of sensation: "teñen ollos e non ven") promoted by Mariscal. Part of Fins's project in returning to Brétema as a detective is to counter this social tendency through professional hyperesthesia: surveying secret spaces, listening, smelling, and, in collaboration with fellow detective Mara Doval, elaborating a new map of Brétema that attempts to make sense of the town's place in global criminal flows:

Mapamundi con anotacións fixadas con alfinetes: Paraíso fiscal, Off-shore, Porto base, Barco nutriz, Transvasamento, Desembarco, Alixo... Tamén trazos de rutas e viaxes, sinaladas en diferentes cores. A liña negra indica tabaco, a amarela, video-tapes, e unha terceira, en vermello, cocaína. Unha verde, desprazamento de persoas. (194)<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Fins bears a resemblance to the character of Marco Matalobos in the television series *Matalobos* (2009–13). Both men return to their coastal Galician hometowns as officers sworn to dismantle the clannish criminal organizations that hold sway there. Fins and Marcos are both local sons (Marcos is literally the son of the former clan boss Álvaro Matalobos and brother of the current boss, Carmelo Matalobos) educated outside of Galicia who return in hopes of effecting change. In both the novel and the television series, however, the real-world local grassroots organizing efforts undertaken largely by women (such as Carmen Avendaño, founder of the organization Érguete) are either ellided or depicted as ineffective, no match for the power of the drug clans. In *Todo é silencio*, resistance to Mariscal's organization is limited to that offered by Fins and his colleagues in law enforcement; although Rivas publicly acknowledges the role of "un puñado de mujeres, las creadoras de las asociaciones de lucha contra el narcotráfico" ("Cuando Galicia" n.pag.), the novel casts the struggle in epic terms, with Fins in the role of hero. In *Matalobos*, grassroots organizers are silenced by Carmelo's henchmen through intimidation tactics that hinge on local knowledge; by reminding the protesters that the clan knows everything about their lives, their businesses, and their problems, the narcos are ultimately able to convince the activists that they risk too much by rocking the boat. Both depictions are potentially disempowering as they fail to register an important aspect of real-world local knowledge: the substantive victories that women-led anti-narco activism achieved. See the film *Ni locas ni terroristas*. (Dir. Cecilia Barriga. 2005).

Both the police and Mariscal's organization use mapping as a tool in the struggle to determine Brétéma's course, thus pointing to cartography as not only a representation or *calque* of that which is, but as means of manipulating and controlling what will be.<sup>42</sup>

Ironically, though, Chelín is insensitive to ways in which those around him are motivated by a desire to shape the future, and his purblindness causes him to see Fins's return to Brétéma and to the school as merely a sentimental trip down memory lane: "Este aínda andaré a remoer os tempos do Johnnie Walker [...] Misión nostalxia, Malpica!" (121). Just as Chelín has little sense of the future, he also has little respect for the past; his residency in the school has been marked by forgetting and erasure, and his worldview is predicated on ratifying the present: "Leda traballa no Ultramar. Ten un fillo con Brinco. E Brinco, Brinco é o máximo" and characterizing even his own youth as part of the distant past: "Pasou un século, un milenio" (121). In line with this denial of the past, Chelín has sold much of the school's contents, including an insect collection, for drugs, thus converting the dreams of the *fillos de Brétéma* into heroin. Chelín relates the trade this way: "Eu xa lle dixen ao ghicho. «Tráioche o Xénese enteiro, isto vale un potosí.» E vai el e deume unha boliña de *cabalo*. «Pois velaí tes a esfera terrestre, para que a metas pola vea.» Para iso deron as especies, para un xute" (118). Chelín is aware of the irony and senses that the transaction symbolizes a loss of something significant; perhaps the loss of the "esfera terrestre" is loss of the *fillos de Brétéma's* cosmopolitan dream, or perhaps the conversion of the dream into a nightmare in which Brétéma is linked to the world not through the flow of ideas but through the flow of drugs. But whatever misgivings Chelín may have count for little. Chelín refuses to offer the

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<sup>42</sup> Bosteels points out that English translations of Deleuze and Guattari often obscure the difference between "tracing" (*calque*) and "trace" (*trace*): "a calque by definition depends upon a pre-existing original or model" (378). I have used "*calque*" here to emphasize the way in which mapping is often thought of as a straightforward representation of space, in spite of the interpretive process that any mapping entails.

ghosts of the school what Derrida has called “a hospitable memory” (175); like the hermit crab that he so admires, Chelín has put the school to use for his own purposes, relegating the original inhabitants to oblivion. Chelín, like Leda and Mariscal, is an advocate of forgetting; in an inversion of his former teacher’s saying “Somos o que lembramos,” Chelín holds that “Somos o que esquecemos” (119). In his words, “Cando esquezo algo, remexo coa lingua na falta da moa. Métese aí os esquecementos. Teño aí un zulo que é un pozo sen fondo” (119). Chelín’s body has become a bottomless well where all that is forgotten is lost forever; although it is stored in the body and becomes part of us, it can never be accessed. Chelín, by accepting this inaccessibility, symbolically breaks with his own family’s past and with his father the *poceiro* who was famous for being able to locate the water that flowed hidden deep underground.

This embracing of *desmemoria* leaves Chelín in the eternal present, where all that is left for the school’s history books to do is to hold his heroin spoon: “A culleriña ben presa, enxertada entre os dous volumes de *La civilización*. Don Pelegrín Casabó y Pagés. O útiles que me son os memoriais. O agradecido que estou á civilización. Colocado á altura da súa obra, ter as mans ceibas para darlle candeas ao cabalo na auga” (119). Chelín has become the antithesis of the *bricoleur* or gleaner who Jo Labanyi, following Walter Benjamin and David Frisby, characterizes as one who “rummages around in the debris or litter left by the past, and reassembles the fragments in a new ‘constellation’ that permits the articulation of that which has been left unvoiced” (69). Although Chelín may resemble a *bricoleur* in that he repurposes the school’s contents, his is an un-*bricolage* that serves to further disarticulate the past and contribute to the sense of collective anesthesia and amnesia; with every injection, Chelín

feels less and remembers less, paying tribute to Morpheus by putting memory to sleep and overdubbing it with silence.

Returning to the characters of Fins and Leda, we have already seen that Rivas links their movement in and out of memory and forgetting to their movement in and out of light and shadow within the *escola*. When Leda bids Fins to return to the *escola* in one of the final scenes of the novel, Rivas once again deploys light and shadow in an aestheticization of their relationship and of the contested status of the site.<sup>43</sup> Fins and Leda now occupy the liminal space between lightness and dark, the two move “No bordo claroscuro” (270), signifying the “question of Brétema” that hangs in the balance: Will the town move definitively toward light and memory, or will it retreat once again into the shadows of forgetting? Will it continue to deny its ghosts, or will it offer them a dwelling place? These interrogatives bring us back to the poetics of “restitución desposuída” where “o sentido de pertenza e o sentido de desherdanza” (Rábade Villar, *Fogar* 178) comeingle: Fins and Leda occupy a caesura, a moment in which there are no heroes or villains, only *fill@s de Brétema*, inheritors of Brétema’s past with all its contradictions and gaps, its history both progressive and *caciquil*, its tenderness and its violence.

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<sup>43</sup> This return to the school recalls Castro’s poem, in which the poetic voice returns to a beloved place in search of the people she once knew there, only to find it deserted, or rather, inhabited by shadows, ghosts:

*Mirei pola pechadura,  
¡que silencio!... ¡que pavor!...  
vin nomais sombras errantes  
qu’ iban e viñan sin son  
cal voan os lixos leves  
nun raio do craro sol* (191).

This moment of suspension comes to an end, and in the novel's last scenes the school burns. But even as this concrete reminder of one aspect of the town's history is destroyed, the question of Brétema—its relationship to its past and to its future—still persists, for the fire signifies both loss and renewal, a turning toward the future, a possible “cumprimento do ainda non sucedido” (Rábade Villar *Fogar* 177). By giving the *escola* a prominent place in the novel and by ultimately allowing it to be destroyed, Rivas binds his narration in the “nó fechado da ‘restitución desposuída’” (178), remembering the *fillos de Brétema* while at once drawing attention to the caducity of their project. Moreover, by refusing to make of the school a *lieu de mémoire*, Rivas reminds us that local memory depends less on the crystallization of history in sites planned and curated as memory delivery systems, and more on the subject who remembers as a part of the process of imagining and building the future. Walter Benjamin, for his part, points to the relationship between the subject of memory, the process of discovery, and the site where the past enters her consciousness: “a función das lembranzas verdadeiras non é testemuñar o pasado, senón describir precisamente o lugar no que o buscador tomou posesión del” (qtd. in Rábade Villar *Fogar* 9). Rivas's novel, to the degree that it rejects *lieux de mémoire* in favor of *milieux de mémoire*, also moves away from testimony and ratifies an ethics of relation in instead of one of mere representation, a move that parallels the Lefebvrian assertion of the primacy of lived space over conceived space. Although in the end nothing may remain of the *escola de indianos*, Leda's final words in the novel, uttered in response to Mariscal's question regarding the contents of the suitcase she carries out of the burning building, speak not to what is lost, but to what remains: “Cousas miñas. Lembranzas” (274). With these words, Leda *takes possession* of the memories that have been sepulchered in the school and allows a crack to form in her identity as “unha

experta en esquecementos” (122) suggesting that she, like Brétema itself, occupies a haunted space between history and forgetting, memory and silence. In the next chapter, I continue my discussion of the interactions of haunting, geography, and representation as I turn to Xurxo Borrazás’s novel *Ser ou non*.

## CHAPTER 4: RUSTICITY, DESIRE, AND THE LIMITS OF NARRATIVE: XURXO

### BORRAZÁS'S *SER OU NON*

Galician narrative is often characterized by the permeability of spaces and by the constant movement of subjects among different kinds of settlements. For urban dwellers, the *vila* or the *aldea* is often a site of return; the subject's (re)insertion into rural space is often framed as an escape from an urban reality that has become alienating or routine. In Suso de Toro's *Non volvas* (2000), a novel in which, as Inmaculada Otero Varela has written, "se pon de manifesto, por unha parte, a importancia do espazo como demarcación da personalidade e, por outra, a oposición frontal entre o urbano e o rural" (96), the protagonist Encarna's alienation from her urban surroundings is expressed in terms of the aggravating noise of traffic and construction: "Como puidera aturar naquela rúa tan ruidosa, mesmo considerala «a súa rúa»; tantos anos naquel barrio, naquel ruído, naquela cidade" (44). This alienation begins to unmake the urban identity that she had so thoroughly come to inhabit, and makes her feel rustic again, "coma unha aldeá acabada de chegar" (44). In Francisco Fernández Naval's *Sombras no labirinto* (1997), Carlos, a middle-aged urbanite, is moved to take a trip to the region where he grew up in order to counter "unha opresión abafante" (21) and the "difícil monotonía do fracaso" in which the routines of work and family life have run his spirit under the wheel.



In many cases, rural sites of return are seen as a repositories of identity, as Suso de Toro states: “Para min o tema da identidade é o tema esencial. Repara en que as claves da identidade son o lugar de onde es [...] e logo a familia, a casa “de quen es.” Na sociedade tradicional eses son os dous trazos que che fornecen identidade: a pertenza a un lugar e a unha xente” (Pedrós Gascón 75-6). But, as Nathan Richardson points out, for Suso de Toro and other Galician authors, the return to the *aldea* is always fraught; there is no true return, only the discovery of one’s own hybridity and the coining of new words (rurban, glocal) to describe it. Return often means confronting one’s own fossilized concept of rurality; in Eva Moreda’s *A veiga é como un tempo distinto* (2011), for example, the emigrant’s experience of the place of origin is exposed as mediated by distance and by the passage of time: “Marchar a Londres, a Hamburgo, mesmo a Madrid ou a Barcelona [...] era marchar de verdade: era resignarse a non ver A Veiga nun ano ou en dous; era saber que, na cabeza dun, A Veiga ía quedar conxelada no mesmo momento en que un a abandonara, e xa non ía nacer ningún neno nin ía morrer ninguén” (13). In this way, rural places often come to be conceived as not only spatially distinct from cities, but also temporally distinct, representative of an earlier moment in history, such that a subject’s movement into rural space is viewed as a movement back in time. But while this may be true for the urban subject, residents of rural communities themselves may be quick to point out that the harsh subsistence lifestyles associated with rurality are a thing of the past; in a 1992 article on changing representations of place in the Courel (a mountainous region in eastern Galicia), Rainer Lutz Bauer argues that local residents of all generations often express “their growing distance from disparaged values and lifestyles they increasingly associate with the past. They gradually transform a rhetoric of “contrastive place” (Fernandez, qtd. in Bauer 574), which

amplifies differences between contemporaneous communities, into a rhetoric of contrastive time, which amplifies differences between communities of different eras” (574). Dominant urbanormative (Thomas, et al.) discourses, however, still conflate rurality with the past; independent of whether this past is viewed positively or negatively, the entwinement of the country with the past is well-entrenched in the popular imagination, and is an important component in many formulations of Galician national identity. Perhaps paradoxically, though, in spite of the persistent rhetoric that equates rurality with true *galeguidade*, Galicians also live in an increasing urbanormative society in which “real life” takes place in the city, relegating a range of non-urban lifestyles and forms of social organization to a merely symbolic plane. This is part of what Dolores Vilavedra, Nathan Richardson, and Eugenia Romero have characterized as the *tension* between the rural and the urban. Romero states that such tensions “have been in a double bind that has yet to be resolved. In most cases, the positive portrayal of one space is in sharp contrast with the negative connotations of the other, suggesting a society in a continuous identity conflict” (*Galician Culture*, xvi). To cite an example of this dynamic that dates back to 1970, Ramón Piñeiro argues that a self-alienated urban minority exerted undue control over rural communities, and blamed the urban middle class for “unha grave ruptura da unidade espiritoal de Galicia” (254) and for the imminent demise of rural ways of life. And although today there are strong voices that speak out in defense of the rural—voices, as we will see in Chapter 6, that issue both from the cities and from rural communities themselves—Piñeiro was correct in his perception that traditional rural Galicia was undergoing a massive transformation: while Piñeiro cites the figure that, in 1970, two-thirds of the Galician population was rural, as of 2002, 75% of the

region's population lived in the largely urbanized Ferrol-Vigo corridor, and only 15-20% of the land was in agricultural production (Loís-González 46).

The historical shift toward urbanity and modernity was bound to produce ghosts, traces, and echoes. Perhaps it is an indication of the degree to which the spectrality of the rural, pre-modern world has become naturalized in the Galician context, that in spite of the fact that both of the novels that I mention at the opening of this chapter link a return to the country with the appearance of ghosts, I failed at first to notice this pattern. In any case, Suso de Toro, Fernández Naval, and Xurxo Borrazás, whose *Ser ou non* I analyze in this chapter, are all authors who have returned once and again to the metaphor of spectrality, often using it to link the ideas of geographic movement, memory, and loss. As for critical attention to the topic, John Thompson dedicates a chapter of his *As novelas da memoria* to the trope of spectral traces (“pegadas espectrais”) and María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar uses spectrality as a central articulating concept in her book *Fogar impronunciable: Poesía e pantasma*. Both of these critics analyze the literary figure of the ghost as a symptom of trauma or loss, both personal and collective, and thus an important point of intersection between literature and politics; as Rábade Villar writes “as historias de pantasmas e outras fábulas poden servir para someter a interpretación crítica o que, nesas historias e fábulas, vai para alén do literario. Ou, se o preferimos, a pantasma pode axudar a desvelar o que liga esas pequenas historias a unha historia política” (*Fogar* 20). From this point of view, literary hauntings, as renderings of how space, affect, and politics interflow, have a good deal in common with microgeographies.

Avery Gordon, deploying Raymond Williams's concept *structure of feeling*, argues that one way of understanding haunting is as a “tangle of the subjective and the objective”

(200). On this view, subjectivity is not locked away in “the self-contained other of the sociological object” (200) but is intertwined with objective material conditions, producing “relations of exchange between the defined and the inarticulate, the seen and the invisible, the known and the unknown” (200). In this chapter I examine the ways in which Xurxo Borrazás’s *Ser ou non* participates in the narrativization of the *hauntological* (Derrida qtd. in Thompson *As novelas* 70) relationship between Galicia’s urban and rural spaces, while also questioning the role of literature in the expression of (contemporary Galician) identity. In the first section, I will analyze the novel’s treatment of the movement of urban subjects into rural spaces, attending to how Borrazás contributes to discourses surrounding the country and the city as coordinates of identity. In the second, I examine the novel’s stance toward literature, storytelling, and the expression of marginalized, spectral voices. I conclude that *Ser ou non*, as a text that fights with its own textuality, works to open up spaces not only between orality and textuality, but also between rusticity and urbanity, atavism and modernity.

Xurxo Borrazás’s *Ser ou non* is a slim novel that manages to combine travel narrative, ghost story, love story, *Bildungsroman*, self-conscious narrative, geography, and literary theory. In light of its formal complexity, I offer an overview of the main narrative arc of the novel, in the hope of making the rest of this chapter easier to follow. The narrator-protagonist, a resident of Vigo, has (possibly) won a literary prize and has come to the rural village of A Pena in mountainous eastern Galicia to write another novel. While there, he attempts to swear off writing, burning all of his paper in the fireplace. In spite of the fact that he has been told that the village is completely uninhabited, all of its residents having either died or moved away, the narrator crosses paths with an elderly woman named Aurora—who is later revealed to be the ghost of a villager who died two years prior to the narrator’s

arrival—whom he invites to his guest house for coffee and with whom he eventually falls in love. When the narrator decides to take up writing again in order to tell the story of Aurora, he finds a few sheets of paper in his printer and resolves to tell his story limiting himself to what he can fit on those few pages. The novel ends with the confession that not everything happened exactly as he tells it, and that, when time allows, he will correct the text and expand it to tell the rest of Aurora's life story. The narrator peppers his tale with reflections on writing and storytelling, while, intercalated with the narrative are deliberations of a literary prize jury, the members of which offer commentary on a book very similar to the one we hold in our hands, a conceit that allows the novel to reflect on itself as if from without.

### **Country and City, Rusticity and Urbanity**

In their 1997 volume *Knowing your place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*, Ching and Creed propose an approach to identity politics that explicitly recognizes place as a coordinate of identity. On their view, “scholarly interest in identity politics has generally failed to address the rural/ urban axis” (3), an omission that they believe derives from a desire on the part of theorists to steer away from environmental determinism. For Ching and Creed, though, place-based identities are not incompatible with the kind of constructionist analyzes of identity formation that have been so useful in advancing the understanding of, for example, gender identity. The authors argue for “a theoretical middle ground in which “place” can be metaphoric yet still refer to a particular physical environment and its associated socio-cultural qualities” (7) and call for the development of a critical vocabulary for discussing “psychic, cultural, and ‘real’ geography” (6). In Ching and Creed's terminology, then, “rustic” and “urbane” are to “rural” and “urban” as “feminine” and “masculine” are to “female” and “male”: cultural constructions that, while in some sense

anchored in objective (physical, geographic) reality, are essentially subjective phenomena. The authors also recognize, along with Raymond Williams, that while *country* and *city*, *rural* and *urban*, are enduring categories through which socio-spatial reality is understood, two caveats must be observed: 1) the historical realities denoted by the terms *rural* and *urban* are multiple and ever-changing (*The Country* 289) and 2), that *rural* and *urban* are relative terms and “almost any inhabited place can be experienced as either rural or urban” (Ching and Creed, 13). In the Galician context, for example, Compostela may seem small and provincial to a resident of Vigo, but for a resident of Becerreá may symbolize urbanity and governmental power, while the whole of Galicia may be deemed a rural backwater by a resident of Madrid or London.

Borrazás’s novel is articulated around a trip in which the narrator, a thirty-something man residing in Vigo, travels to eastern Galicia to spend a month as a rural tourist, living in a renovated house in the village of A Pena de Ancares.<sup>44</sup> With Forcadela, I find that “[e]ste marco diaxético [...] serve para construír unha polaridade semántica esencial no decorrer da ficción, aquela que se vertebra entre o rural/urbano, inculto/culto, atraso/tecnoloxía, etc.” (“Ser ou non” 193). The village appears to be completely abandoned, and all of the buildings have fallen deep into disrepair, except for the house where the narrator is lodged, which has been modernized by the enterprising son of the property’s owner. By inserting this modernized “urbane” space inside the “deep rurality” (Halperin, qtd. in Ching and Creed 15) of the village, Borrazás creates a heterotopia where city and country not only coexist, but where the modernized guest house is a sort of bastion of civilization surrounded by an imposing rurality, physically linked to civilization by the recently installed power and phone

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<sup>44</sup> While the narrator of the novel is unnamed, in the short story he identifies himself as “Andrés”, a particularity on which I comment later in this chapter.

lines, tendrils of modernity. This spatial structuring leads to questions about what it means to be in the country; inside the house, the narrator enjoys “rural” living with all the modern conveniences, such as internet, refrigeration, and running water, but he is reluctant to move outside of that zone of comfort into a more direct relationship with nature. On his first night in the house, he is scared of what lies beyond the doors of the house and imagines that he will be eaten by wild dogs, and even the geology of the place is threatening—the narrator imagines the voice of the mountain peak [petouto] saying “Calquera día caio [....] No momento menos pensado esvaro e ¡zas! a tomar polo cu” (13). To calm his anxiety, he downs a sleeping pill and takes extra measures to isolate himself from the rural environment. The narrator reports that the first night, “Botei todos os pasadores e refuxieime baixo catro capas de algodón e poliamida” (30), after which he proceeds to engage himself during the first days of his stay not by physically exploring his new environs, but rather by trying to get the lay of the land from the safe and comfortable vantage provided by his window.

But while the narrator’s first impulse on arriving in A Pena is to enclose himself in a bubble of urbanity, he is conflicted about the city, and sees himself in some sense as a rustic: “Pese a vivir na cidade, sempre fun montesío” (8). This kind of dual identity is also expressed by the narrator’s mother’s affirmation that people “teiman en vivir contra do seu: as máis bestias veñen á cidade e as civilizadas foxen aos montes” (60); on this view, *urbanity* and *rusticity* as identities inherent to the individual are capable of generating movement and hybridization between the country and the city. For the narrator, being a rustic in the city means being hermetic, sealing himself off from relationships in which he has no interest. He affirms, “carezo de relacións porque ás mozas a aos amigos hai que lles dar conversación, escoitalos chorar, facerlles agasallos, cheiralos, perdoalos, defendelos, poñerse no seu lugar,

mantelos informados. Eu, a verdade, prefiro ler. Ou calcetar” (9). Thus, the narrator links city living with forced sociability and an undesirable proximity to others; in order to tolerate his urban existence, the narrator develops strategies of social evasion, including a possibly unhealthy attachment to literature, a point to which I will return later. But even as he attempts to avoid the bothersome aspects of human relationships, for example by seeking sexual satisfaction in pornographic films, the narrator must confront the abjection of others’ sexuality:

Unha noite fun ao cine X no centro da cidade e tiven que pagar a entrada, limpar o asento, cheirar o seme reseso durante hora e media, non poder erguerme nin fumar, escoitar xemidos coma orneos en cada recuncho da sala, pisar regueiros de cuspe ou algo máis visguento [...] ao saír dese inferno [...] debín aturar unha andanada de bicos e polo menos un lapo verde disparado nas tebras que me impactou en plena orella e que me vin obrigado a limpar cos baixos da camisa. Enriba acabara o horario dos buses e tiven que pagar un taxi para volver á casa. Nunca máis. (15)

Here, the narrator experiences the “centro da cidade,” and symbolically urbanity itself, through unwanted contact with other people’s bodily fluids, and laments even the lack of affordable public transport to deliver him back to the safety of home and privacy. The city, the narrator complains, “nunca será o meu medio” (9).

In travelling to A Pena, then, the narrator is looking for an antidote to his urban woes; the village appeals to him because his landlord promises that it is completely unpopulated: “Vin á Pena porque me dixeron que non ía haber ninguén” (7). When the narrator says that “todo o quería simple e baleiro, o mundo e máis eu” (11), he reveals that his concept of the ideal country getaway involves total social isolation, a country experience not defined by a “change of pace” or exposure to a “different way of life,” but rather the country as an un-city, vague in its particulars. As Ching and Creed point out “The ideal country is the place urbanites visit, not the place poor people eke out a living” (20). While the narrator finds the



idea of cutting himself off from civilization appealing, he also experiences dread when confronted with certain rural realities, like the darkness of a moonless night: “Ao caer a noite, isto de “caer a noite” é aquí máis certo que en ningures, tamén desaparecen os camiños. Non hai escapatoria. Unha noite sen lúa no monte é algo arrepianete, o estado natural” (34).

As the narrator approaches A Pena in a hired Land Rover, he must try to square the abstract notions of the country he has constructed from maps—in Lefebvrian terms, *conceived space*—with the physical reality he sees through the truck windows. The narrator expresses surprise that points on a map correspond to real places, but observes that some places are not mapped, and therefore do not exist in the symbolic order: “Outros [lugares] non saían nos mapas, lugares desprezables para os conquistadores cartógrafos de escala 1:250.000. A Pena era un deles. Os cartógrafos pasárono en coche co lapis entre os dentes e sen erguer a ollada dos seus cadernos” (31-32).<sup>45</sup> If maps such as Fontán’s *Carta geométrica* (Hooper *Writing Galicia* 13) and the various cartographic representations in Rivas’s *Todo é silencio* are created in order to inscribe oneself in the political landscape, by voyaging to this uncharted place, the narrator of *Ser ou non*, finding himself with no influence over what gets mapped and how, hopes to write himself out of the world by going where the cartographers cannot see him. Although the idea of needing to hide from cartographers might have been absurd at the time *Ser ou non* was written in the early 2000s, my readers in 2014 will be very familiar with the desire to manipulate one’s cartographic presence. While some live in fear of

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<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Francisco Rodríguez Iglesias’s *Atlas de Galicia*, with a resolution of 1:200,000, does not show A Pena de Ancares. I am therefore unable to confirm or deny its empirical existence and leave the pursuit of this question as an exercise for rural tourists with literary inclinations. Borrazás himself identifies A Pena as “inspired, or shaped by a tiny village called Robledo, near the not so tiny Rao, belonging to the even less tiny Navia de Suarna” (“re: FWD Xurxo Borrazás story” n.pag.).

having their image captured by Google Maps Street View or their movements monitored by both corporations and governmental agencies, others voluntarily use mobile technologies to geo-tag their everyday activities, keep track of their exercise routine, or remind themselves to buy moustache wax and diapers the next time they pass a drugstore. If, as Rábade Villar writes, “a presenza de espectros na literatura galega evidencia a necesidade [...] de conversar con ese pasado que sempre son os mortos e cos restos deixados pola experiencia histórica da desaparición” (*Fogar* 24), I would predict that as the real-world possibility of cartographic self-erasure disappears, artistic and literary explorations of de-mapped subjects will become more common. If this should come to pass, Borrazás will have been on the vanguard with his narrator who, claiming that “entrar nun mundo implica saír doutro” (32), enters A Pena in order to leave behind an urban world in which he is excessively self-conscious and to escape from the shame and embarrassment that are the warp and weft of his accustomed urban existence. (Significantly, the guest house he stays in is called *O Refuxio*.) For the narrator, “a vergoña relaciónase coas paisaxes nas que se cría” (23), and therefore a move off the map entails a kind of psychological liberation. Although the narrator believes that, in theory, the cartographer (like the postmodern subject) experiences the world as multiple and simultaneous—as “mil mundos nun”—in practice, by zooming in, by choosing a microgeographic scale (manifested here as A Pena), one can block out some of the bothersome multiplicity and create the illusion of a singular, coherent subjectivity. Rural travel, on this view, is not necessarily about, as the adage goes, seeing the wider world and thus becoming more cosmopolitan, but rather about finding an empty space in which to imagine a narrower world, a local—even private—world that excludes the cosmopolitan.

Dennis Porter has written that “most forms of travel at least cater to desire: they seem to promise or allow us to fantasize the satisfaction of drives that for one reason or another is denied us at home” (9). For the narrator of *Ser ou non*, travel holds out the possibility of effecting a rupture with his normal life and identity, a rupture that requires that he travel light. The narrator affirms “se un leva consigo o lugar de orixe, non viaxa” (29) and expresses relief that there are no newspapers in A Pena to remind him of the goings-on of the wider world. Travel, then, is more than the temporary physical absence from home; it is also a temporary severing of one’s ties to the quotidian, a process that the narrator hopes for even as he fears it will be a temporary and futile disentanglement, futile because, as he points out, the inevitable trip home means that “todo volvería a enguedellarse: as noticias, a familia, a rutina” (23), echoing Porter’s claim that “[t]he longing to leave one’s homeland, like the longing to return is the expression of a subject’s desire that is as insatiable as it is as [sic] unlikely ever to find final satisfaction” (11-12). As we have seen, however, the narrator’s commitment to the pursuit of disentanglement is questionable from the outset, as his vacation begins with his ensconcement in a bubble of modern convenience, and, with his desktop computer and printer, he is hardly travelling light. There is no illusion that he intends to “rough it”. At the same time, though, he yearns to do without: in addition to not having access to newspapers, he has sworn off television and radio and entertains a fantasy of pastoral purity in which he restores himself by drinking only “auga fresca dos mananciais” (49). And although he has come to A Pena partly to write, he eventually swears off writing as well, a practice that he begins to associate with ineffectual urbanites and his own “vaidade de artistaña” (35).

Through this search for physical purification and psychological disentanglement, the narrator seems to ratify the idea of the country as pure and simple. But although he tries to create a rupture with daily urban life, the narrator soon discovers that this is, as Porter warns, an unattainable fantasy, that there is no fresh spring water: “Pero estabamos en setembro a as neves derreteran meses atrás; unha mágoa que o meu pulo saudable e pastoril se frustrase por un erro do calendario” (49). The narrator, realizing that he is out of step with the rural reality in which he has immersed himself, falls back on his usual habits of consumption, which include hearty daily doses of internet pornography and alcohol. His fantasy of spring-water-drinking purity is soon forgotten as he immerses himself in sadomasochistic websites and in the task of repeatedly intoxicating himself on *augardente*: “¡que lle desen polo cu ao cabrón do fígado!” (50). By allowing the narrator to fail and backslide in this way, Borrazás points to the hollowness of the narrator’s project and opens up a space for critiquing how urban subjects conceptualize rural spaces.

As part of this critique, Borrazás presents the dynamic of rural tourism as a process that capitalizes on the desires of both absentee owners of rural property and of urban vacationers. The property owners, in the case of A Pena, aspire to be *post-rural*, to rid themselves of their families’ properties and in so doing become fully urban. For the Barcelona taxi driver who grew up in A Pena, for example, “desprenderse dun cortello na aldea é limpar a memoria, darlle brillo ao pasado, e enriba cobra” (14). At the same time, the rural tourism entrepreneur who buys up an abandoned village in order to fix it up “con subvencións públicas” and subsequently “ateigalo de turistas vestidos de militar cargados con escopetas e coches todo terreo” (14) manages to recycle the village, the refuse of the historical process of urbanization, into a value-added product that will appeal to vacationing

urbanites. Although the narrator participates in this tourism, his derisive tone makes clear that he views the rural tourism industry with suspicion. From his cynical perspective, the appeal of imagining the once-bustling life of a rural village is based on the certainty that such a reality is firmly in the preterit tense: “É atraente porque agora todo isto desapareceu” (13). The narrator also ridicules certain urban architectural grammars, such as building homes with exposed beams [trabes rústicas] and decorating those homes with folksy touches [toques enxebres], that deploy rural signifiers to create a style that will appeal to urban dwellers. To cite another example of this stylization of the rural, the narrator observes that tourists “prefiren a maleza ás leiras” (77), in other words, that they prefer to imagine rural spaces as sublime, wild, given over to nature, rather than confronting the hard reality of the *labrego*.

When a Catalan television crew comes to film dawn over the mountains of the Ancares, the narrator also casts that work as part of an urban stylization of rurality, what Forcadela has called an “idilio” imagined by “a poboación da cidade que segue a pensar nesa soidade utópica, pastoril, nese lugar de concentración ou centro cara ao que tendía segundo a antropoloxía algo fascista, todo hai que dicilo, de [Mircea] Eliade” (“Ser ou non” 194):

Filmaban alí o ceo en cor maxenta, o reloucar do resío nas follas e as rochas, a progresiva definición das tonalidades na vexetación das lombas cara ao oeste. Semanas despois nun estudio en penumbra montarían unha secuencia de escasos tres segundos por cada media hora, un interludio relaxante no decurso dun documental divulgativo sobre os Ancares: *Segredo verde* ou *O corazón húmido*. (147)

With these invented titles, the narrator evokes and parodies the topic of Galicia as moist and verdant, or as Ramón Piñeiro formulates, Galicia as “un país da Europa húmida,” a land “de gran fermosura, con enorme, case infinida variedade de formas no seu modelado e de tonalidades nos seus verdes. E todo tan suavemente harmonizado que chega a enfeitizar ó espectador sensible” (8). Both the film crew and Piñeiro recognize the appeal of the Galician

landscape as a spectacle, as an abstract, condensed aesthetic experience at a remove from real, lived experience.

For as much as he may ridicule these stylizations, as an urban subject the narrator has inherited—perhaps through the distorting lens of the media—a conception of the rural landscape that does not necessarily correspond to material reality. Upon arriving in A Pena, he admits that the landscape he finds does not conform to his expectations; although he is technically adept at describing the landscape he finds there, pointing out the “soutos, xestas, valados, queiroas, cavorcos e vetos de rocha afilada que os procesos xeolóxicos despuxeran en liñas rectas polo monte arriba” (31), he struggles to square what he sees with his idealized notion of what a forest is: “Un pensa no bosque e imaxina a taiga e sequoias centenarias, non xestas, codesos e piornos” (31). This is another example of the narrator’s lack of knowledge pertaining to the concrete realities of the place he has chosen to visit. In an inversion of the trope of the country bumpkin who arrives in the city (see Richardson), the narrator is presented at moments as a clueless urbanite (perhaps inappropriately shod in what Borrazás elsewhere describes as “calzado de pisar alfombras” [*Na maleta* 33]) in spite of his negative view of city dwellers and his ambivalent relationship with his own urbanity.

This ambivalence is manifested in a dislike of people who fear animals and “bichos”: “A xente que ten medo aos bichos é inhumana, relixiosa, cultural, o peor da especie” (35). For the narrator, disdain for animals is a failure associated with excessive urbanity, and indicates a distancing from humanity’s true nature. But despite his self-avowed rusticity and repeated affirmations of his love of animals, the narrator has also internalized urbane standards and expectations regarding the infiltration of animals into the human sphere, an internalization that constitutes a defense against the Spanish rhetorical tradition of

associating Galicians with animals, from Larra's quip "El gallego es un animal muy parecido al hombre, inventado para alivio del asno" (qtd. in Murado 67) to Lope de Vega's verses "Ay, gallega, rolliza como un nabo/ Entre puerca y mujer, que baja al río" (qtd. in Murado 71). In one tragicomic episode, the narrator smothers his small pets in peach syrup to avoid the shame of being discovered as a rustic by a newspaper reporter from Madrid. The narrator associates his own attempts at cosmopolitan urbanity with a failure of compassion toward animals:

Que dirían o fotógrafo e a xornalista da capital, afeitos ás entrevistas en terrazas sobre os cantís dunha illa paradisíaca, afeitos a ver pendurados Tàpies ou Barcelós nos baños, cando visen os meus caracois na verza, o escáncer a facer eses na area, as musarañas ergueitas co fociño contra o cristal, os cágados e rás na auga lagañenta? (37)

Here it is clear that the urbane is not necessarily urban; an "illa paradisíaca" may become urbane when occupied by urbane subjects who use the majestic natural setting to point up their own sublimity. The narrator parodies the aesthetic codes of urban literary supplements—in which writers are expected to lead fabulous, picturesque lives and to have valuable works of art hanging in their bathrooms—while at the same time revealing that these codes hold him in their sway, causing him to experience his modest Vigo apartment as inadequate and unbefitting a cosmopolitan literary sophisticate. The narrator, thus, regards himself through the looking glass of the Spanish media, and what he sees is an intractable rustic, what post-colonial theorist Ashis Nandy calls an "intimate enemy" (qtd. in Good et al. 12), an object of self-hatred that creates a splintered subjectivity, "a split self in which one element is repressed or denied" (Good et al. 12).

When the newspaper calls to cancel the interview, the narrator's shame is redoubled in the face of the cold urbanity of the newspaper personnel: "falaba un rapaz con timbre

atiplado e ton de oficina. ¡Eles que saberían! Tanta vociña e máis tanto ‘venga’ (38). The cosmopolitan subject is in one sense deprecated here, linguistically marked by his tone of voice, his use of Castilian, and specifically by his use of the leave-taking expression “venga”. The narrator’s dismissive attitude toward the man on the phone ties a new loop into the Gordian knot of Galaico-Hispanic relations, in which mutual fascination and animus are tangled together, an ontological snarl that is intimately related to the themes of urbanity and rusticity. Not content to dismiss the literary supplement as urbane nonsense, he seeks out the edition in which he would have appeared and becomes sexually aroused by the image he finds there: the highly-polished, hyper-urbane female host of a television program on children’s literature. As he kisses the image and prepares to masturbate, he simultaneously professes his adoration for the image of the television host (“bronceada [...] cun sorriso cheo de dentes brancos”) and his distaste for the culture-making machine that put her in the paper: “Ela que culpa tiña [...] Tanta sección fixa e tanto suplemento. Tanta pose de primeira comunión e tanto escritor na súa casa. Debíanlle chamar *A torre de marfil*, e desabrochei o cinto” (39). By suggesting that the literary supplement should be called *A torre de marfil* while at the same time becoming aroused by it, the narrator both expresses the degree to which such hyper-urbane media—and the images of perfection they propagate—position themselves at a remove from the consuming masses, and exposes the machinery of desire that such distancing sets into motion.

The narrator’s desire for the woman in the literary supplement is but one manifestation of his disordered urban postmodern sexuality. As we have seen, the narrator’s life in Vigo is characterized by a studious avoidance of social relationships; because of his inability or unwillingness to connect with others as complex subjects (see also chapter 5 of



this study), his sexual desires are expressed through a fetishizing deconstruction of the female body and its adornments. Here the narrator describes the young female clientele of his cybercafé: “As nenas xogaban nos ratos e os teclados con suxeitadores á vista, tangas a asomar polo cu ou minisaías á altura da cona máis un dedo como salvagarda de pudor. Cheirábaas suar mentres bambeaban ao son da música que lles entraba polo casco e logo lembraba as súas caras antes de ir durmir, as diademas, as tatuaxes, os ollos pintados, os *piercings* no nariz, debaixo do labio, na cella, na lingua, no embigo” (53). The narrator’s practice of seeing the female body as a collection of parts extends also to his consumption of images on the internet, a technology that expands the geographic range of his fetish and contributes further to the split between body parts as objects and the embodied subject to whom they belong; a vivid example of this phenomenon is the fact that the narrator keeps a “catálogo de vulvas do extremo oriente” on his computer and uses one of the images “de icono para os meus documentos e de salvapantallas” (108). The novel’s presentation of the narrator’s sexuality offers a critique, then, of one kind of urban alienation: a fascination with bodies that goes hand in hand with a rejection of embodied subjects and thus denies the social nature of sex. In his effort to free himself from social relations, the narrator has given rise to a pastiche sexuality in which objects of desire are pulled from their original social, embodied context and mentally reassembled. In light of the narrator’s self-identification as a rustic, this postmodern, often technologically mediated sexuality signals the narrator’s hybrid identity: the very unsociability that he believes makes him a rustic (“sempre fun montesío”) also is the motor that drives him away from a stereotypically simple, natural, unmediated rustic sexuality.

In this context, the erotic relationship that the narrator develops with the character of Aurora is of special interest. The relationship between the two serves to problematize further our notions of rustic and urbane identities, showing the ways in which both the narrator and Aurora are—leaving aside for the moment Aurora’s spectrality—hybrid subjects.<sup>46</sup> On a first reading, though, the character of Aurora represents an under-developed Galicia similar to the one that, for the Courel residents that Bauer writes about, has happily been relegated to the past; she is the last hold-out in a village that people have been all too happy to forget about. When the narrator introduces himself as a writer from Vigo, then, he invokes a set of binaries—modern and primitive, coastal and inland, city and country, literate and illiterate—and one can hear the cultural dissonance as their worlds begin to come together. The narrator, conceiving of his a position in the relationship as one of cultural superiority to a rustic other, believes that it is incumbent upon him to bridge the social divide. Having invited Aurora for coffee out of “simple urbanidade” (106), the narrator attempts to channel the discourse into a neat flow of polite conversation, maneuvering to counter what he perceives as difficulties inherent in communicating with “paisanos e paisanas” with whom one is never sure if one is being made fun of or mocked (echoing the stereotype of Galician peasants as *pechados* and *retranqueiros*), and who “falan coma se cantaruxasen unha canción” (52), a characterization that casts rural forms of discourse as marked—the ambiguity of the term is fitting—by oral tradition. Thus the narrator, a self-proclaimed “túzaro” and “montesío” becomes an unlikely ambassador for urbanity and sociability, and a metonym of the city’s overflowing energy and discursive excesses, filling all gaps in the conversation with questions, offers of unspecified help, and explanations. In spite of the fact that, in his usual urban context, the narrator is

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<sup>46</sup> In light the Aurora’s depiction as a ghost, the village’s name—A Pena de Ancares—takes on a double meaning: *pena* as a large rock and *pena* as in *alma en pena*.

struggling, marginalized and lacking any particular cultural capital, with Aurora he believes himself automatically superior by dint of his urbanity: “Críame con vantaxe. A muller estaba na miña casa e non entendía nada. Aos seus ollos eu pasaría por un científico teórico ou un destemido aventureiro. Só podía deixarse levar ou perderse na selva dos latinismos técnicos” (67).

Aurora’s lack of hygiene, her technological naiveté, and her illiteracy allow him to believe, at first, that he is in charge, that his urbanity and his modernity translate into authority and power. When he asks Aurora whether she farms or keeps a garden, he does so not out of authentic interest but with a certain condescension, believing that he has a special key for drawing out taciturn locals: “É ben sabido que nas aldeas sempre funciona o tema das leiras” (76). We as readers are allowed to participate in this feeling of occupying a place of privilege in the cultural hierarchy of place; as modern, urban, reading subjects, we are on the privileged side of urbannormativity, and can allow ourselves a laugh at Aurora’s expense when she describes a freezer as “o inverno” (68), when she asks who writes the letters on the computer screen, when she points out that the narrator cannot possibly wash her clothes for her because he doesn’t have a washing trough: “Non tes lavadoiro” (88). Borrazás puts us in an interesting bind. Although Aurora is arguably the more sympathetic character, her pronounced rusticity, her smell of soured milk, and her truncated phrases serve to define almost automatically her as “other”. In spite of our affections for Aurora, it is clear that she represents the marked term in the urban-rural binary.

Embedded in the narrator’s discourse, however, is an awareness that, while his knowledge and his hygiene make him a typical modern urban subject, they do not automatically confer upon him superiority with regards to Aurora. In other words, the

narrator continues to gather evidence that urbanormativity is a morally bankrupt paradigm. Gradually, the narrator's own voice begins to sound pedantic to him, for example when he explains to Aurora what calcium is: "Os alimentos con calcio séntanlle ben ao corpo, especialmente á xente maior porque os ósos están feitos de calcio —as persoas con estudos hoxe abrimos a boca e acabamos por converternos nun cruzamento de moralista e curandeiro (78). The narrator's free-flowing discourse becomes a sign not of his erudition and urbanity, but rather of his extreme nervousness and discomfort when called upon to converse with another human being. It is as if, in engaging in a one-on-one conversation with Aurora, the narrator finds himself engaged in a distilled form of social life the likes of which he has never let himself experience in the city. There, in Vigo, although he is surrounded by people, the narrator has created a strict line of demarcation between himself and other subjects, valuing others as aesthetic constructs ("Eu valoro esteticamente as vivencias" [54]), while embracing the inter-subject divide and aggravating his own social alienation. With Aurora, the narrator is surprised to find himself in dialogue, an unsettling situation that leads him to seek refuge from his refuge in an immediate return to the safety and anonymity of the city: "Ao día seguinte sen falta volvería ao refuxio das estradas, os horarios, as ocupacións produtivas, as televisións. Procuraría o anonimato e a discreción da cidade e os documentos, a seguridade do artificial. Volvería a Vigo" (57). The unsuspected presence of Aurora where the narrator had been assured that "non ía haber ninguén" and her infiltration into his rented house—his bubble of urbanity—destroys the narrator's fantasy of a rural escape (see Thomas, et al.) and eventually gives rise to the main narrative event of the novel—the sexual relationship between the narrator and Aurora—a sort of Harold and Maude story in which a

hapless youth is cured of his existential malaise by an older woman who teaches him the meaning of life and love.

On this preliminary reading, then, *Ser ou non* offers a narrativization of the incursion of an urban subject into a rural space where he finds authenticity and comes to understand the error of his urban ways. In this sense, the novel employs generic tropes of the rom-com— young man gets straightened out with the love of a good woman—that lead to a kind of happy ending (!) in which the narrator realizes the emptiness and sadness of his previous life, proclaiming “fun un sapo triste ata que vin á Pena” (119) and crediting Aurora with his transformation: “Cambíaches mesmo a miña vida anterior. Se vises como falaba antes, se me escoitases pensar... estarrecerías” (118). Read in this way, the novel also participates in essentialist Galician rhetoric that associates the rural with authenticity and, significantly, associates rurality with the feminine. As I note elsewhere in this study, Thompson, Romero, and Moure, among other scholars, have signaled the frequent association in Galician culture between the femininity and the land [a terra nai]; in *Ser ou non* this association is manifested not only by the fact that Aurora, as the only rural subject with whom the narrator has significant contact, becomes a metonym for all of rural Galicia, but more specifically by the fact that nature in general and the Ancares mountains in particular are eroticized through Aurora: “A natureza enteira estremeceuse con ela. Era como facer o amor coa serra dos Ancares.” (137). This connection between Aurora and nature is confirmed when, after her death, the narrator imagines her body becoming a tree: “O corpo de Aurora foi aleñando ata virar un tronco san e inzado de aneis” (171). Aurora is not merely rural, she is effectively pre-modern, as she has given up tending her garden and has become a hunter-gatherer, as she describes here:

Dende hai dous anos voume mantendo co que saco da terra: castañas, abelás, noces, figos, mazás, verzas, amorodos na primavera, amoras en agosto [...] Ás veces fágome amiga dun coello, estou quieta, fálolle coas vistas, cólloo polas orellas e ásoo nas brasas, chucho uns ovos de rula ou apaño o que deixian os señoritos que pasean polo monte [...] Moitas noites penso en canta comida se vai estragar cando eu non estea. (76-77)

The schematic reading I have just outlined—in which the narrator represents vice, dissatisfaction, and urban alienation while Aurora represents nature, love, and plenitude—treats the narrator-protagonist and Aurora as traditional, centered subjects, each one representing certain coordinates of identity and confirming certain stereotypes of urbanity and rusticity. As I suggested earlier, however, both the narrator and Aurora are perhaps better seen as hybrid subjects; in the next section, I pursue the idea that the novel as a whole can be read as countering precisely these essentialist, homogenizing discourses concerning what it means to be urbane or rustic, as well as what it means to be Galician.

### **Dialogue and Hybridity**

Perhaps the first difficulty one has in accepting an interpretation in which the narrator and Aurora are metonyms—he of the city, she of the country—is that both characters are outcasts, marginalized subjects within their respective social milieux. We have already seen that the narrator conceives of himself as a rustic in the city, and indeed, he describes himself and his mother as inhabiting a kind of no-man’s-land: “Logo estabamos nós, ela e máis eu, que formabamos un grupo á parte. Sen sermos bestias, toda residencia nos era hostil” (60–61). His mother, having inherited property in her home *aldea*, quickly sold the property below market value because “iso lembroulle a súa orixe e tomouno a mal” (61), much like the property owners in A Pena who sell off their holdings as a way of breaking with the past. The narrator, in an effort to make a place for himself in the city, invests his mother’s money in a cybercafé, only to run the business into the ground: “coa miña iniciativa empresarial

arruinei a mamá en dous meses” (54). This situation underlines that rejecting a rural past does not lead inevitably to a sunny urban future, or to put it another way, that neither the rustics nor the urbanites have a monopoly on failure.

For Aurora, in spite of having lived her entire life in the village, life there has never allowed her much happiness. Beginning with her husband’s death in a roofing accident shortly following their wedding, Aurora is ostracized and maliciously gossiped about. Her life story, as she tells it to the narrator, is one of a truncated project to create a home:

[...] dispoñiamos dunha horta de medio ferrado e catro galiñas. Que non chovese dentro, a cociña de ferro e trocar o colchón de palla por outro de la, iso era todo. Á semana de casarmos, estaba a retellar para poñer a casa bonita e esvarou. Caeu mal. A caluga foille bater no ferro dun arado e partiu a columna. Vino caer e morreume nas mans, coa lingua fóra e estricando pernas e brazos. Nin sequera me quedou un fillo para velo ao un no outro; pillounos o mes atravesado. Nin sequera me quedou el tolleito para que os veciños me respectasen, para ter con quen parolar e rifar, a quen arrimarme, a quen ulir, a quen ver comer ou espirse. (85)

Far from representing a *terra nai*, Aurora is “a nena viúva” (81), an example not of an idyllic rural life, but of a life lived in the confines of the village, inserted in a social and material reality that blocks the pursuit of plenitude. In Aurora’s words, she has spent nearly “sesenta anos sen raíces nín follas, unha árbore podre e furada por avespas, vermes, formigas” (86), and her metaphor of a tree that is compromised, infected, and incomplete casts a shadow over any idealized notions we may harbor about rural life, and offers a counterpoint to the more positive arboreal metaphors I examine in Chapter 6.

*Ser ou non* thus presents both Aurora and the narrator as unsatisfied subjects, one existing in a rural matrix and one in an urban matrix, and both expressing desire for what the other has or represents. Through the intersection of these subjectivities, the urban and the

rural dialogue with one another, as evidenced in the following exchange, in which Aurora speaks first:

- Se cadra tes razón e debín de ir igual a Barcelona. Os que foron non voltaron, só o fillo do Xisto, que vai e vén coa maquinaria, carpinteiros, albaneis.  
—¿Quen sabe se non voltarán máis? ¿Os fillos dos que marcharon?  
—¿Por que habían voltar?  
—A vida dos labradores esmorece e nas cidades a xente acúsase de destruíla. Bótanse en falta a si mesmos e pensan que na aldea, plantando un abeto canadiano, se van atopar. Os pais foxen do campo e os fillos devecen por el, simple idealismo: a natureza, as raiceiras, nostalxia do Edén, a soidade, os anuncios. Sonlle moitas horas de propaganda, moito tempo libre e moito mando a distancia.  
—Xa.  
—A min gústame.  
—¿Estar só?  
—Xusto.  
—Habías pecharte na Pena cincuenta anos. (91)

In a sense, this exchange shows that they are both right, that the country and the city are both objects of desire, and that urbanity and rusticity as coordinates of identity are not mutually exclusive. While Otero Varela has written that in *Ser ou non* “a unión carnal entre os dous personaxes se converte nunha metáfora de unión de dous mundos: o rural e o urbano, o artesanal e o industrial, o sobrenatural e o audiovisual” (97), I argue that the narrator’s relationship with Aurora represents less a union and more a dialogue that creates new perspective through the juxtaposition of positions, what Oswaldo Estrada, following Bakhtin, calls a hybridization of the novelistic discourse that “se debe no a la mezcla o combinación de [...] puntos de vista sino a su enfrentamiento explícito dentro del texto” (57). It is important to signal here that dialogue differs from dialectic; whereas the latter works toward synthesis through the exposition of a thesis and its antithesis, the former is open, porous, and atelic. To the degree that the relationship between the narrator and Aurora is a dialogue and not a dialectic, then, it represents less an “unión de dous mundos” than it does a sharing of



desires, an eroticization of Dolores Vilavedra has called Galicia's "tensión patolóxica entre campo e cidade" (*Sobre a narrativa galega* 158). If erotic relationships between individuals are a series of *(des)encontros*, successions of psychic and physical couplings and decouplings mediated by the fluctuations of desire, by eroticizing the encounter between the narrator and Aurora, Borrazás creates a microgeography that emphasizes the relationality of the urban-rural interface, its shifting, dialogic, indeterminant character.<sup>47</sup> In this sense, Borrazás's novel moves away from what Nestor García Canclini has called the confirmation of self-sufficient identities and toward an exploration of "formas de situarse en medio de la heterogeneidad y entender cómo se producen las hibridaciones" ("El malestar" 86), as both subjects incorporate elements of the other's cultural practices and ways of seeing, creating new, hybrid subjectivities: Aurora takes up daily baths, internet porn, and brand-name yogurt, while the narrator discovers conversation and sex that involves more than one person.

Borrazás's novel is part of a larger Galician discourse that places the rural and the urban, the present and the past, in conversation. In reference to Manuel Rivas's *Os comedores de patacas* and *¿Que me queres, amor?*, Eugenia Romero argues that Rivas "explores the diverse elements that conform a *Galeguidade* by the juxtaposition of urban and rural lives" (40) and it bears noting that Romero refers here to "a *Galeguidade*," thereby suggesting the *galeguidade* is a concept with multiple instantiations and permutations that, like any abstract noun, papers over the refractory plurality of the concrete. For its part, *Ser ou non* participates in the production and representation of hybrid, juxtapositional *galeguidades*

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<sup>47</sup> Although it might seem odd to conceptualize intimate relationships as geographies, let us consider that Sumana Ghosh, following Adrienne Rich, describes the body as "the geography closest in" (Rich 212), "a boundary between self and other, both in a literal physiological sense but also in a social sense" (Ghosh 126). In view of this, erotic relationships are (along with friendships, see Bunnell et al.) inherently geographic encounters, products of existing emplacements and flows, while also productive of new geographies.

by creating a literary *parrafeo* in which an appreciation of “*o reloucar do resío nas follas e as rochas*” dialogues with a disdain for Galicians’ “*fodido apego á terra*” (174).<sup>48</sup> At the same time that it celebrates dialogue, however, *Ser ou non* rains on its own parade by questioning whether the dialogue it proposes is even real and, more broadly, to what degree literature can satisfy the human need for narrative. It is to these metaliterary interrogatives that I now turn.

### **Ser (literatura) ou non: Storytelling and Writing in Tension**

In a 2011 article on metafiction in contemporary Galician narrative, Francisco Martínez Bouzas identifies Xurxo Borrazás, along with Cid Cabido, as one of the most interesting Galician authors “[de] talante fronterizo, aberto e experimental” (n. pag.), singling out Borrazás’s *Eu é* (1996) as “o paradigma de novela posmoderna” (n.pag.) in the context of Galician literary production since the mid-1990s.<sup>49</sup> Following Dolores Vilavedra, Martínez Bouzas states that the work of Borrazás and other writers of similar sensibilities can be characterized by a tension between plot [“a anécdota argumental”] and what truly interests the author, namely the creative process and the identity of the author, the characters, or the reader (n. pag.). At the same time, Martínez Bouzas signals that postmodern narrative techniques—what he calls “*novos xeitos de narrar*” (n.pag.)—have largely not been embraced by Galician novelists and indeed, that many literary critics have been skeptical of the very notion of new ways of storytelling.

*Ser ou non* is a continuation of Borrazás’s trajectory as a postmodern novelist, and exemplifies the tension between plot and other formal concerns described by Martínez

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<sup>48</sup> “Parrafeo: 2. Conversa amorosa entre mozos” (“Parrafeo” n.pag.).

<sup>49</sup> In this context, we must mention Suso de Toro’s *Tic tac* (1993), often cited as the Galician postmodern novel par excellence for its fragmentary, collage-like structure that allows only “interpretaciones subxetivas e puntuais” and forecloses any attempt on the readers part to “empregar a realidade empírica como referente semántico de interpretación textual” (Vilavedra *Sobre a narrativa* 55).

Bouzas. Borrazás employs narrative techniques and formal devices that, while not necessarily *novos xeitos de narrar*, allow the work to engage with these “other concerns”. Specifically, *Ser ou non* uses narrative self-consciousness to call into question the traditional dominance of written over oral modes of storytelling, to explore the nature of the narrating self, and to denounce the institutional character of the literary system. In this way, the novel prefigures Borrazás’s interest in the topic of suicidal art, art that “sente e expresa un desprezo rabioso por ela mesma” and in so doing finds one of its greatest themes (*Arte e parte* 153). According to Borrazás, suicidal art uses intellectual sophistication to illuminate “a nosa escisión con respecto ao natural,” speaking to “o contraste entre o que somos e o que imaxinamos ser” and the existential terror that such a disconnect provokes in us (*Arte e parte* 154). In the case of *Ser ou non*, this sophistication takes the form of a self-deprecating reflexivity that ultimately relates back to the themes of urbanity and rusticity.

The first of the novel’s suicidal techniques is the use of an unnamed narrator who questions the unity and coherence of his own identity and characterizes the idea of self as a fiction, comparing it with a theoretical framework that becomes more unreal as it becomes more elaborate (100) and admitting “Eu non era o que pensaba ser” (100). At one point the narrator emphasizes his multiplicity by claiming to also be the narratee of his own tale, addressing himself in the second-person plural as “vós”: “Cando digo “vós” é unha licencia, falo dos outros eus que en min batallan e agora escoitan cínicos e malvados” (64), suggesting that the story we are reading is only one of the possible narratives that this multiphrenic self might have produced. By presenting his own identity as “not [...] an ordered narrative but [a] multiple identification amongst the babble of discourses” (Currie 103) while also trying to be “ordenado” in the telling of his tale (30), the narrator exposes the tension between giving

shape to a narrative by means of “the normal controlled admission of meanings” (Currie 103) and distorting it through monologic discourse, thus exposing the inherent partiality of his narrative.

Just as the narrator is conscious of his role as narrator, Borrazás’s novel is conscious of its status as a literary artifact. This narrative self-consciousness is manifested in the novel’s numerous references to and reflections on literature and storytelling. The work not only constructs a fictional reality, but also “self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, qtd. in Amago 178). *Ser ou non* begins with the affirmation that no one pays attention to a writer, and closes with an apology for the inaccuracies of the story we have just finished reading. In this way, Borrazás brackets the narration, drawing attention to the complex conditions of production and consumption in which the narration is enmeshed. Although the novel’s metanarrative complexity is modest in comparison to an intensely reflexive work like Carlos Cañeque’s *Quien*<sup>50</sup>, Borrazás does weave metanarrative elements into the novel at various levels, violating “the traditional distinctions among the act of narrating, the act of reading, and the narrated product” (Spires 16) and thereby creating a work that warns us against straight-forward interpretations.

One of Borrazás’s narrator’s many voices is that of an armchair theorist of narratology. He prefaces his story with an exposition of a hierarchy of narrative value in which the story as lived experience is the pinnacle: “Se puidésemos ser personaxes, non existiría a literatura nin lectores nin escritores. Xogarse a vida é o realmente intenso” (7).

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<sup>50</sup> Borrazás’s novel shares with that of Cañeque several metafictional elements, including the conceit of the literary prize, which gives the impression that at least part of the work with which the reader is presented actually existed prior to its own writing. See Amago (2006) for a detailed treatment of Cañeque’s novel.

Working his way down the hierarchical chain, the narrator points to the pleasure of hearing a story. In this schema, the storyteller is a marginal figure, given that “As historias verdadeiras cóntanse elas soas” (7): when there is a real story to be told, the author’s job is merely to transcribe it (45). At the bottom of the hierarchy is the writer, a kind of hack whose “enfeites estilísticos e comentários” (45) are tricks of the trade that are likened to a tradesperson’s silicone caulk, “silicona milagreira” that covers up a lack of true quality. Given his negative appraisal of the value of literature, the narrator makes the claim that the story we are reading is in some sense not being written at all, affirming that “Isto que ledes non é escribir, é un falar” (21). This will to orality not only serves to distance the story from literature, but also signifies an abnegation of the authority normally conferred by lithic status of the text.

The narrator of *Ser ou non* also serves as a critic of the literary system. As the reader of Borrazás’s novel is continually reminded, the machinery that surrounds the production and consumption of literary texts—the literary prizes and Sunday supplements, the judgmental librarians and vain would-be writers, the publishing houses and book signings—is not only hypocritical and false, but deeply, and hideously, urban(e).<sup>51</sup> As the novel advances, it becomes increasingly clear that for the narrator, writing is far from being a satisfying *métier* that allows him to make a meaningful contribution to a culture he values. Instead, he characterizes it variously as an addiction, a “medicina da que non podo prescindir” (24), a source of vanity, a pastime, a substitute for experience, a business, a waste of time. His distaste for literature is fueled by his low opinion of his own literary talent, and for him the (supposed) success of his novel is evidence that the literary system is a sham. He questions,

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<sup>51</sup> Urban in the geographical sense of being located in the city—perhaps it is not accidental that the narrator is from Vigo, the seat of much of the Galician publishing industry including the publishing houses Xerais and Galaxia—and urbane in the social sense of being associated with cosmopolitan, bourgeois values.

for example, the positive critical reception of his supposedly realistic rendering of dialogue: “¿que realismo nin que carallo pinchado nun pao, se eu non dialogo con nin deus?” (25). If an antisocial “lorcho” can write a well-received piece of narrative fiction, his logic goes, the publishers and critics must be so divorced from real human dialogue that even a cheap imitation seems worthy of praise. (The narrator would surely refute my own earlier claim that the his relationship with Aurora constitutes a productive rural-urban dialogue.) The narrator disdains his own prize-winning book, claiming that the whole project was a mistake— “Trabuqueime de cabo a rabo” (24)—and affirming “non teño talento literario ningún, nin nacín para iso nin hei morrer artista. Nin puta idea, vaia” (24). In this context, the prize jury’s praise of the book, as reported by the narrator, rings false and is unintelligible even to the author, our narrator:

Falouse de Torrente Ballester e de Camilo J. Cela, de Cunqueiro e Fernández Flórez, de Valle-Inclán de “mundos máxicos e paralelos, dunha linguaxe enraizada na terra, da estrutura poliédrica, de ruptura das barreiras entre ficción e realidade cunha estética persoal que superaba a vacuidade das híbridas posmodernas”. Eu non o entendía e por se acaso calaba. (25)

While the jury’s public characterization of the narrator’s book could have been a blurb for the book we hold in our hands, when read with the knowledge of the conflicts and machinations of the prize jury, it becomes a parody of literary taste-making.<sup>52</sup> The narrator, wondering why he was chosen for the prize, conjectures that perhaps “as localizacións nesta terra de néboa, meigas, tolos, enigmas e aparecidos, deberon valorarse como un manto de protección e misterio” (25); this can be read as an ironizing critique of the Spanish national

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<sup>52</sup> The back cover of *Ser ou non* reads, in part: “En *Ser ou non* esborrállanse as fronteiras entre ficción e realidade. Un escritor, sexo en internet, unha aldea abandonada, un amor non convencional... e os que están do outro lado: o xurado dun premio, os lectores, as lectoras. Pode ser actuación, xogo e finximento, ou non. Por iso esta novela relata a historia da súa propia creación, cóntase a si mesma. Porque a literatura tamén é real.”

literary system and its desire for Galician novels that play into stereotypical view of Galicia.<sup>53</sup> More generally, the situation faced by the narrator exemplifies the dynamics of cultural exportation as analyzed by Galician literary critic Antón Figueroa, who affirms that “cando unha cultura é descoñecida ou pouco coñecida, precisamente por iso mesmo, a tendencia é á exotización, a interpretación exótica do produto” (*Nación* 160–1). Figueroa defines exoticization as “un modo de interpretación ficcional da cultura allea,” a process that is in some sense inevitable but which must, nonetheless, be monitored in order to “verificar se o produto se exporta como produto literario ou artístico (é dicir, histórico necesariamente), ou como produto exótico” and to question “se o que facemos é ofrecer un espectáculo artístico pola nosa dinámica histórica ou se, en sentido inverso, [...] o que estamos facendo é convertérmonos nós mesmos en espectáculo (alleo) de ficción pola vía fácil” (*Nación* 161). In this context, we can see that the narrator is all-too-aware that his work may not be valued for its artistic merits but rather for its ability to satisfy what Figueroa calls the “curiosidade do *voyeur* polo exótico” (*Nación* 162). But to return to the jury statement cited above, by crafting the communiqué in such a way that it mentions only one writer—Cunqueiro—whose creative production is primarily in Galician, Borrazás points to the shallowness of Galician literature’s penetration at the level of Spain and the willful suppression of the fact that some works by Galician authors—works the Spanish reading public may only know in translation—were in fact written originally in Galician.<sup>54</sup> At the

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<sup>53</sup> María Reimóndez argues that the promotion of Galicia, in Spain and elsewhere abroad, through its “imaginary landscapes” (“Whose Heritage” 196) and “rural, historical, and monumental aspects” (194) was part of a concerted cultural planning effort on the part of the Fraga government to cast Galician culture as “harmless and decorative, existing peacefully within the Spanish state” (194).

<sup>54</sup> At times there seems to exist a policy among Spanish publishing houses of suppressing the fact that a work has been translated. For example, I have before me the Spanish-language version of *Siete palabras* by Suso de Toro (Alianza 2010), and nowhere in the front-matter is there any mention of the work’s having been translated

same time, Borrazás also pokes fun at the Galician literary system and its *criterio filolóxico* when the narrator wishes that those who criticized him for writing in Spanish would set aside their high-flown rhetoric and historical allegories and simply insult him directly: “As boas maneiras e a hipocrisía con inimigas da intelixencia, e un bo índice para certificar a parálise social” (21–22).

In this context, the narrator of *Ser ou non*—with his ambivalence toward literature and his praise of storytelling, and caught as he is between exoticization and irrelevance—comes to advocate a delinking of literature from personal and collective identity. For him, the literary system is too institutional to be trusted with something so complex as our identities, too inherently homogenizing to account for the plurality of stories, the “outros eus” that abound in each of us. Along these lines, David Wilson has speculated whether “it might not be literacy itself that has allowed for the possibility of the modern ‘alienated’ subject” (169).<sup>55</sup> Although Wilson’s formulation is strong, many critics have pointed to the hegemonic force exerted by the written word, a force that leads to the suppression, in Maurice Halbwachs’s terms, of “lived memory” and the imposition of “learned memory”

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from Galician. María Reimóndez, following Xosé Manuel Dasilva, has analyzed this phenomenon as cultural phagocytosis: while Dasilva signals that “la fagocitación que desde el centro se practica de las obras autotraducidas difumin[a] el perfil lingüístico de no pocos escritores periféricos” (278), Reimóndez goes a step further, emphasizing the violence that this phenomenon implies. “Phagocytosis,” Reimóndez writes, “is not just eating but incorporating [the other] into the macrophage and neutralising the possibility of infection” (“(Self)Translation and Phagocytosis” n.pag.), where “infection” is understood as the presence of non-hegemonic cultural products within a hegemonic system. In the example I cite above, by failing to acknowledge that Suso de Toro’s *Siete palabras* is a translation, Alianza stealthily contributes to the assimilation of Galician literature into the Spanish literary system, thus undermining the diversity of the Iberian cultural ecosystem (for more on the connections between linguistic diversity and ecology, see Chapter 6). As a means of resistance to this forced assimilation, Reimóndez proposes a strategy of “programmed indigestion” to be carried out through the deployment of eccentric translation tactics—leaving portions of the text untranslated, providing translator’s notes and glossaries, publishing with a firm best known for dog training manuals—that force the reader to acknowledge the text as culturally and linguistically other.

<sup>55</sup> Teresa Moure claims that literature is an alienating institution that attempts to erase “todo o que poida lembrarnos que os seres humanos nacen de muller e están obrigados a morrer, que teñen corpo, sentido e emocións, que posúen experiencia e manteñen unha relación viva co medio ambiente: coa terra, coa auga, co aire, coas plantas, cos animais e, claro está, cos demais seres humanos” (*O natural é político* 173).



(57). William J. Nichols has argued that texts such as Manuel Rivas's *O lapis do carpinteiro* work against this suppression by vindicating oral tradition “como un acto subversivo que desafia los principios ordenadores de la escritura—sea ya oficial, periodística, o novelística” (157). While there is a certain irony in vindicating oral tradition from within a written text, perhaps what is really being vindicated is the novel as a dialogic and polyphonic space. Vilavedra argues in her chapter on polyphony in the Galician novel that “estratexias discursivas como a polifonía contribuirán a dotar de entidade textual a discursos sociais silenciados ou marxinados polo discurso oficial” (*Sobre a narrativa* 68). Borrazás's novel uses polyphony to just this effect; it is a novel that tells many small stories, that gives voice those who have been rendered ghostly by dominant, institutional discourses. The village of A Pena itself—a ghost town in the normal sense of being abandoned, but also in terms of its banishment from the realm cartographic representation, as I mentioned earlier—is described to the reader and therefore enters the symbolic order. In the same way, Aurora, considered by her former neighbor to be “unha vella tola,” is registered, through the act of narrating, as a thinking, feeling subject. Even the members of the prize jury whose opinions—ranging from a dismissal of the book's narrative techniques as “macanas metaliterarias” (26) to an assessment of it as “unha ficción [inventada] para conquistar a realidade” (26) to a qualification of it as an “obriña [...] rara” (40)—were not registered in the jury's official statement, become part of the story.

But even if novels constitute a potentially polyphonic space, Borrazás's work also signals that the literary system in which the novel is inserted is always a contested space; it is a space that judges and selects, granting or denying its approbation to the voices that seek to

enter it. The narrator of *Ser ou non*, in spite of having won a literary prize, continues to feel like an outsider:

Cando un grupo de xente se reúne e me entrometo ou tento participar, todos me tratan como unha manta enchoupada ou un condón usado, danme o aprezo que se lles dá aos pelos do nariz, viuse na entrega do premio: todos me odiaban ou se mofaban de min, non entendo por que carallo me premiaron. O mesmo editor púxose a aplaudir no medio do meu discurso para cortarme. Logo un dos membros do xurado, o rancio escritor que se arrastra polas tertulias das televisións, colleume do ombro e tirou de min para atrás, ata quedar tapado polas autoridades. (179–180)

In addition to cutting off his acceptance speech, the prize jury also recommends changes to the novel, such as lengthening it to improve its heft and thence its marketability (96). In this way the prize jury and the publishing house seek to curate the narrative, turning it into a commercial product and placing it at a remove from narrative-as-lived-experience. This process of *production* is perceived by the narrator as a distancing of the storyteller both from the story and from his audience. As an indication of this on the last page of the novel, the narrator addresses the reader/hearer not now as “vós” but as “vostedes” and contemplates changes to the text, such as a shift from first-person to third-person narration and a shift in the temporal orientation. Perhaps, he wonders on the last page of the novel, it would be a good “que os verbos recuasen un paso cara a unha zona remota ou hipotética, a ver se así acadaba esa anxeiada distancia: ‘Viñera á Pena porque lle dixeran que non ía haber ninguén...’” (182).<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

The end of the of *Ser ou non* signals a movement away from the story as “un falar,” away from the inherently evanescent, changing nature of the *conto oral*, each telling of which

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<sup>56</sup> Compare the sentence from first page of the novel: “Vin á Pena porque me dixeran que non ía haber ninguén” (7).

exists (only) in the memories of those who were there to hear it. The novel, as it comes to its conclusion, begins to become a monument, a memorial, a *lieu de mémoire* that comes to fill the gap left by the disappearance of the *milieu de mémoire* of oral culture. As a novel that dreamt of being “un falar,” *Ser ou non* exists between orality and textuality; it is a novel that tries to shed its textuality and fights against becoming a monument. At the same time, it is curious to note that initiatives like the Candidatura de Patrimonio Inmaterial Galego-Portugués seek just the opposite: official recognition from organizations like UNESCO that would, in some sense, serve to monumentalize oral heritage as a “masterpiece” (Reimóndez “Whose Heritage” 197). As Borrazás himself points out in his book of essays *Arte e parte*, suicidal art is a response to the trap of monumentalization, noting that “[a] arte contemporánea, a arte suicida, pretende rescatar o que nos seres humanos hai de suxeitos: vivos, actuantes e impredecíbeis, debaixo da coiraza de obxectualización que a Lei impón a través da escritura” (159). For Borrazás, this is a process that is doomed to failure, but whose abandonment represents an even worse fate.<sup>57</sup> The disjunctive is not succeed or fail, it is *ser ou non*: “Se a arte pretendía ser algo fermoso, fracasou./ Se a arte pretendía ser algo importante, fracasou./ Se a arte pretendía ser algo intelixente, fracasou./ Se a arte fracasou, existe./ Velaí a súa maior virtude” (159). By proposing that the greatest virtue of art lies in its ability to assert its own existence in spite of its failures, Borrazás suggests that suicidal art is an expression of what Rafael Dieste refers to as a Galician “furor ontolóxico”:

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<sup>57</sup> In his analysis of Manuel Rivas’s *O lapis do carpinteiro*, Joseba Gabilondo points to one kind of such failure. Citing the novel’s projection of Daniel da Barca onto a mythical plane, particularly through the discourse of the journalist Sousa, Gabilondo argues that in spite of the thematization of orality in the work, Rivas ultimately reifies “literate masculine bourgeois modernity”, neglecting “an oral subaltern rural feminine one” (“Masculine Masochism” 89). For Gabilondo, this is what “allows Rivas’s work to become a collective narrative and memory” (89), which is problematic because “only in so far as Rivas legitimizes a modern masochist masculine subject as hegemonic does he represent Galicia as collective (a collective that is neither subaltern nor oral)” (89).

un desexo de que as cousas existan realmente, un degoiro de que teñan unha perduranza, mais non unha perduranza pola dureza exterior, pola máscara que se lle poida pór, ben material ou formal, senón entrañabel, interior, de xeito que a perduranza exteriormente manifesta sexa máis que o signo, a luz, a mensaxe de algo fortemente sólido, sólido coma o ser, que se encontra dentro e configura eternidade por si soa. (qtd. in Borrazás “re: Xurxo Borrazás story” n.pag.)

In this context, I propose that *Ser ou non*, as a novel that questions the hegemony of writing over orality, expresses a version of Dieste’s *furor*, a desire for narrative that is solid as being itself, abidingly real, more than a mere mask of *silicona milagreira*. As a self-conscious narrative that declares its own failings, however, the novel reflects on a formal level its main theme: the contemporary dominance of not only of writing over orality, but also monumental over vernacular culture, urbanity over rusticity. If *Ser ou non* is “a dialogue between forms [of] and reactions to desire, and forms [of] and reactions to power” (“re: Xurxo Borrazás story” n.pag.), it is in the uncharted microgeography of Pena de Ancares that these relations of power are laid bare, revealing that the rural, vernacular past is, like Aurora, a spectral trace, an exotic Other who inevitably slips from our embrace. In light of this, just as a novel that dreams of being a “falar” must reflect on its own failures, the modern urban subject who dreams of rusticity must reflect on the absurdity of his or her desire. As an accounting of this process of self-reflection, Borrazás’s novel constitutes an “acto humanista *malgré lui*, de reivindicación da realidade que segundo os códigos realistas nega” (*Arte e parte* 159).

## **CHAPTER 5: THE EMBODIED URBAN SUBJECT: DIEGO AMEIXEIRAS'S *DIME ALGO SUCIO* AND *HISTORIAS DE OREGÓN***

“To talk of the city of the twenty-first century is to conjure up a dystopian nightmare in which all that is judged worst in the fatally flawed character of humanity collects together in some hell-hole of despair.” ~ David Harvey

In this chapter, I read Diego Ameixeiras's *Dime algo sucio* (2009) and *Historias de Oregón* (2011), arguing that while these novels contribute to a dystopian conception of the postmodern city as a site of alienation, dissatisfaction, and violence, they also propose, however tentatively, the possibility that the city, so often the site of death and dehumanization, can also be a site of creativity and resistance. Throughout my analysis, I examine how Ameixeiras deploys an urbano-corporeal poetics that explores the interactions between the microgeographic scale of the body and the mesogeographic scale of the city to reveal what it means to be an embodied subject in an era characterized by what Lefebvre has denounced as the de-corporealization of space.

This line of inquiry contributes to a larger current in contemporary Galician Studies that recognizes the need to understand cities and how they are constructed and imagined in Galician cultural production, a critical project that is, arguably, more important than ever. In the last fifty years, the process of urbanization has profoundly affected Galician society and

its image of itself, producing the tensions and desires discussed in Chapter 4 in connection with Xurxo Borrazás's work. In Galicia, cities have traditionally been viewed with ambivalence; Antón Baamonde states that many who seek in the city the attainment of "ese soño de libertade existencial que sempre encarnaron as cidades" find themselves confronted with an intense feeling of *desarraigo*, the price to be paid for leaving the *aldea* or the *vila* in pursuit of the urban ideal (27). In Ameixeiras's Oregón novels, however, *desarraigo* is only rarely experienced as an explicit longing for the country or as a literal geographic displacement; the only meaningful link to rural life is the perhaps ironically named Asunción, an elderly and disabled woman whose family has moved her from her moribund home village in order to care for her in their urban apartment (*Dime algo sucio* 53). In this way, *Dime algo sucio* and *Historias de Oregón* are thoroughly urban, and Ameixeiras's Oregón is host to the range of urban experience, from the plainly nightmarish to the dysphoric, from the banal to the joyful. On balance, though, Ameixeiras's Oregón novels are a critique of the city, which he presents as a place in which community life, seen as typical of traditional, especially rural, forms of spatio-social organization, is deeply eroded and *desarraigo* is felt as what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feeling," a real but only dimly perceived social experience "in solution" (*Marxism in Literature* 133–4). Community life has been replaced by a ubiquitous postmodern consumer culture where human relationships are increasingly mediated through technology, people are commodified, turned into little more than desiring subjects or objects of desire, and economic inequality produces a city split in two, "dos mundos que se odian porque se tocan" (*Dime algo sucio* 146). This erosion of meaningful social relationships leaves bodies behind as a spectral trace: I suggest that although Lefebvre critiques urban space as increasingly de-corporealized, Ameixeiras's novels show that while subjects in the

modern city are no less embodied than in the past, social atomization has dehumanized the experience of embodiment. Seen in this way, the violence and dissatisfaction that characterize Oregón are symptomatic of a social system with the potential to destroy both coherent subjectivity and inter-subjective empathy, thereby creating a milieu in which bodies—one's own and those of others—are simply objects to be dealt with, used, abused, and discarded.

By focusing my analysis of Ameixeiras's representation of urban experience through the lens of embodiment, I hope to make explicit the ways in which bodies are places in senses I have adopted in this dissertation: they are space infused with meaning (Oakes and Price (254), sites of articulation and contestation, they exist in relation to other places (Lepofsky 2). As Jon Anderson puts it, the body is a "material and somatic site [that] can be considered as a place in the same way as any other: it can be taken and made, given meaning, and be part of a set of trace-chains that affect how we think about and act in the world around us" (153). In light of this, microgeography, as a strategy for the interpretation of cultural products, must attend to the body, in spite of the initial awkwardness one may experience in considering the body or specific bodies—especially "the fleshy, leaky, unstable bodies we all inhabit" (Oakes and Price 388)—as objects of geographical analysis. This aspect of my project is informed by the work of geographers such as Robyn Longhurst, who notes "a pressing need to examine the interconnections between bodies and places because the ways in which we live out these interconnections, these relationships, are political" ("The Body" 93). It is also inspired by Adrienne Rich's oft-cited formulation that the body is "the geography closest in." In her 1984 essay "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," Rich writes:

I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history [...] Begin, though, not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in—the body... the politics of pregnability and motherhood. The politics of orgasm. The politics of rape and incest, of abortion, birth control, forcible sterilisation. Of prostitution and marital sex. Of what had been named sexual liberation. Of prescriptive heterosexuality. Of lesbian existence... Not to transcend this body, but to reclaim it. (212)

Rich suggests that the embodied subject's experience of space is necessarily influenced by sexual and gender politics, as well as the types of violence that those politics endorse and impose; this dynamic reveals that social phenomena always contain a multitude of microgeographies that are lived by individual sexed, gendered, and raced bodies.<sup>58</sup> For Longhurst, Rich's position is part of a tradition of essentialist approaches to the body that "tend to take the differentiated embodiment of subjectivity (or the biological or anatomical body that is commonly purported to be the 'real' body) as a starting point for feminist analyses." Longhurst contrasts Rich's position with the constructionist view of "bodies as discursively produced or as primary objects of inscription and social production" ("The Geography" 215). In her own work, Longhurst, following Gillian Rose, adopts an ambivalent position that does not "ignore the flesh or the biological body [nor] remove that so called 'real' body from the particular cultural, ethnic, historical and class positions that construct it" ("The Geography" 215), a position that is closely aligned with my goal in this dissertation of taking into account both the material and the symbolic aspects of place.

Along similar lines, urban theorist Reena Tiwari believes that the body is important for understanding how space is lived and experienced (see Lefebvre) and argues that "It is the body that inscribes its thoughts, emotions, meanings, and memories onto the space, and in the process is transformed" (18). Tiwari, following Grosz, Pile, Merleau-Ponty, and others,

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<sup>58</sup> Indeed, in the novels treated here, as well as in Ameixeiras's more recent works *Todo OK* (2012) and *Matarte lentamente* (2013), most of the specific topics that Rich mentions are prominent themes.



adopts a multifaceted notion of the body that includes not only the physical body, but also “ideas of the physical and mental realm, as well as the individual, social, and political body associated with it” (18). Citing Pile (1996), Tiwari holds up both “the inner and outer world of the individual as [...] important in understanding the links between the environment, spatial behavior, and the mind” (20). By emphasizing the body, Tiwari also emphasizes the subject position, a move that allows her to supply a counter-narrative to the rationalist, top-down, impersonal strategies of urban planning, directing critical attention to the urban practices of residents, practices through which people may transcend the role of consumer of the city as spectacle by engaging in poiesis, the creation of the city:

The relationship of the people to the city goes beyond perceptual recognition. The connotations that users place on the city and rely on while reading it are contrary to [Kevin] Lynch's reliance on the denotations of the physical environment. The connotative codes will be different for different people at different times. Thus, it is not sufficient to simply understand the connotations, but also the way different people relate to them in different contexts. (26)

Or, in Steve Pile's formulation, bodies are not

passive bodies which simply have a space and are a space: they also make space. They draw their maps of desire, disgust, pleasure, pain, loathing, love. They negotiate their feelings, their place in the world. In their body-ego-spaces, people speak their internal-external border dialogues. Finally, bodies occupy, produce themselves in, make and reproduce themselves in multiple real, imaginary and symbolic spaces, which are never innocent of power and resistance. (209)

For Elizabeth Grosz, this notion of the production of bodies is important in moving beyond notions of the city as good or bad, or, in terms of the body, as conducive or unconducive to the body's health and well-being. Grosz instead frames the question as one of examining “how different cities, different socio-cultural environments actively produce the bodies of their inhabitants” (109), how “the form, structure, and norms of the city seep into and affect all the other elements that go into the constitution of corporality,” and how the city

“affects the way the subject sees others” (108). Of particular interest to us here are Grosz’s comments on the social production of sexed bodies, given that Ameixeiras’s *Oregón* novels are full of sexual violence, desire, and a nearly ever-present (male) gaze: “The city is one of the crucial factors in the social production of (sexed) corporeality: the built environment provides the context and coordinates for contemporary forms of body. The city provides the order and organization that automatically links otherwise unrelated bodies: it is the condition and milieu in which corporeality is socially, sexually, and discursively produced” (104). But for Grosz, the city is not just the context for the body. Instead, the body and the city are bound by “mutually defining relations” and there exists a two way linkage or interface between them characterized by “the productivity of bodies and cities in defining and establishing each other” (108). Among the many ways in which this process of mutual definition takes place, Grosz points to the city as a “site for the body’s cultural saturation, its takeover and transformation by images, representational systems, the mass media, and the arts” (108).

For Rose Gillian, this takeover is disparately felt by different social groups; Gillian argues that when a subject’s social attributes are inscribed on the body, the ability to participate in defining social spaces (like cities) through the kind of poesis advocated by Tiwari, Lefebvre, and others is undermined because space is hegemonically white, bourgeois, heterosexual, and masculine (147). On this view, for members of marginalized groups, the experience of social space is often one of confinement, as “a body feeling constrained by a particular gender, class, and race position” (145). Gillian, following Young, argues that the condition of embodiment in space is more salient for the marginalized (especially female) subject who views space as not their own:

Unlike men who believe they can transcend the specificities of their body and see themselves and their intentions as the originating co-ordinate for organizing everyday space, women see their bodies as placed in space among other objects. Because our bodies are an object to us, we see ourselves as positioned in a space not our own. And that space can feel like an alien territory. Women's sense of embodiment can make space feel like a thousand piercing eyes [...] Spaces are felt as part of patriarchal power. (146)

Perhaps paradoxically, this awareness of space is seen as serving both to encourage self-abnegation and erasure from space on the part of the marginalized subject, what Gillian calls "a desire to make ourselves absent from space" (143), and to create the consciousness necessary to begin framing social space as a site of resistance to "the exclusions of dominant subjectivities" (150).

Michel de Certeau, however, contends that "Marginality is today no longer limited to minority groups, but is rather massive and pervasive" (xvii). Certeau views everyday practices as the ideal platform from which to resist the city as a totalizing, rational, universal, "almost mythical landmark" (95) that epitomizes "the techniques of sociocultural production" (xiv). In De Certeau's famous account of the subject who observes New York from atop the World Trade Center, experiencing it as a legible whole, the return to street-level is a return to the scale of the body, of the walker, where ordinary practitioners of the city engage in "microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress [...which] have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy" (96). For Certeau, then, the individual is the locus of such counter-hegemonic practices as re-appropriation and improvisation, which allow passive consumers to be transformed into active 'users'; when multiplied, these practices "give shape to spaces"; "they are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize" (97).

Fortified by this brief introduction to some critical approaches to the (urban) body, in the next section I begin my exploration of Ameixeiras's urbano-corporeal poetics by examining Oregón as a fractured space characterized by an existential *desarraigo* articulated through a dialectic of isolation and collision.

### **Isolation and Collision**

Jonathan Raban writes that cities offer a type of overwhelming freedom, but that the “spaciousness and privacy of city life [...] so often presents itself as emptiness and fog” (245). Recent cinematic representations of cities, such as the Mexico City of *Amores Perros* (Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu 2000), the Los Angeles of *Crash* (Dir. Paul Haggis 2004) and *21 Grams* (Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu 2003), or the Buenos Aires of *Medianeras* (Dir. Gustavo Taretto 2011), have explored the interplay between urban isolation and the unexpected intersection of lives that cities can sometimes generate. In Ameixeiras's Oregón novels, a markedly cinematic, vignette-based narrative style, characterized by short chapters that mete out information, seems to recreate this urban fog of isolation, initially disorienting the reader, but eventually revealing the strange crossings that the movement of urban bodies engenders. In this way, Ameixeiras's Oregón is a city of intersections where the reader, much more than the residents themselves, has a sense of how the city brings individuals into contact with one another. In many cases, this contact is physical, even violent; characters literally crash into one other, breaking down the neat separation that, despite physical proximity, they strive to maintain in the interest of privacy and anonymity. Bus passengers in Oregón sit in the aisle seats, leaving the window seats empty thereby protecting their personal space, but a quick stop can send them flying toward one another, reaffirming the fact of physical copresence. Ameixeiras makes these intersections into a motif: the multiple

car/ pedestrian crashes serve to illustrate the points in urban space where individual trajectories meet, and other intersections are brought about by other kinds of chance occurrences—the finding of a lost wallet or of a piece of laundry fallen from a neighbor’s clothesline. In this section, I will focus on the characters of Ánxela and the *home negro* from *Dime algo sucio*, examining each character’s experiences of the unexpected intersection that brings them together in order to show how Ameixeiras uses the motif of the random urban encounter to signal embodied experience as inflected, not only by individual psychology, but also by race, class, and gender, as well as citizenship and migratory status.

The character of Ánxela lends insight into the subjective experience of urban isolation. Ánxela is depressed and suicidal, a mental state which at times seems to provide her a strangely heightened experience of the spaces she moves through, from her own body to the city itself. For her, all spaces, from the body outward have become *unheimlich*; she seems to move through her life desiring death, self-erasure, alternately hoping to return to life or to be delivered from it. As she swims in a pool, for example, she experiences an “imposible sosego azul,” imagining herself as a reptile losing its skin and becoming new again, but she also wants to “estoupar, romper, habitar algún lugar inerte”; a moment later she considers herself “practicamente larva, segura de renacer cunha longa ducha nos vestiarios” (41). At one point, the contemplation of her own hands triggers results in an emblematic crystallization of the post-rural sense of *desarraigo* I describe above: “Quería mans grosas, cotenos curvados e a mesma rugosidade da pedra, pero a cadea rachou e só pode facer arqueoloxía coas paisaxes da infancia. Desexaría introducir os dedos na terra e erguerse para amosar o froito, pero nela perdeuse o culto” (123). By describing Ánxela’s longing for work-knarled hands and her identification with reptiles and larvae, the narrator

suggests that her inability to fully assimilate her status as a modern urban subject has resulted in an unattainable yearning for that which is pre-modern, even primitive. By frequently shifting the focalization, however, the narrator shows the reader what Ánxela's experience looks like to others, which very frequently is nothing special or unusual. By juxtaposing Ánxela's point of view with that of her fellow citizens, the narrator creates a dramatic contrast between what is felt and what is seen, between the person as subject and the body as an urban object, an atom moving through space. Ameixeiras points to this inter-subject divide elsewhere in the novel, for example when a neighbor rings Ánxela's doorbell just as she is contemplating killing herself with sleeping pills. The neighbor, Miriam, comes away with the impression of the suicidal woman as "Moi boa xente, unha tía supertranquila" (141). In Oregon, a robust notion of community as *communion*, characterized by "close personal ties, belongingness, and a strong sense of duty and obligation between its members" has been reduced to community as mere geographical propinquity with "no implication of the quality of the social relationships found" (Bell and Newby, qtd. in Urry 145).

If, as discussed above, the body inscribes its thoughts, emotions, meanings, and memories onto space (Tiwari 18), Ánxela's moments of despair color much of her experience as she moves through the city, they seem to pull her away from the city's objective reality into a mythical space where she is gripped by a desire for the city to be cleansed by a "diluvio universal" (69) or to be emptied, converted to an imaginary "cidade cero," a "lugar baleiro, un deserto inabarcable" (186). As extreme as Ánxela's despondency may be, the narrator offers the observation that individuals' existential crises are always part of the subterranean topography of shared spaces:

Todo o mundo entende que ata os caracteres máis vitalistas e luminosos se permiten o luxo de ter pensamentos terribles en lugares pouco propicios para a

tristura, polo menos segundo o canon social de espazos habilitados para un certo entusiasmo [...] Ánxela desexou estar á morte na sección de ultraconxelados. Desaparecer. Non respirar máis. (134)

Here we note the juxtaposition of spatial order—imposed by the frozen foods section, that paragon of the late-capitalist separation between the consumer and her environment—and psychic disorder. Ánxela’s shopping trip apparently conforms with socially-sanctioned use of space—perhaps she seems to be contemplating a box of *milanesas*—but is experienced as something quite different: a desire to go back to the moment when “foi creado o seu corpo e dar marcha atrás” (135). For Ánxela, despair turns the city into an enemy, a nightmare, something that is falling down around her and that threatens her very body. Only at exceptional moments does she return to being anchored in the here-and-now, to experiencing her embodiment as something positive; immersed in a thermal pool, Ánxela, for once, feels serene, that her body is a “corpo feliz” (106).<sup>59</sup> The nightmarish quality of Ánxela’s experience is in hiatus, and the tone of the narration becomes lyrical, in contraposition to the bluntly realist tone that dominates the novel: “Vai unha noite clara, coa lúa inventando sombras, enchendo a ribeira cunha luz prateada” (106). This shift in tone reflects on a formal level the fact that, on a psychological level, Ánxela’s ability to find beauty in her surroundings is rare indeed.

Another of these exceptional moments occurs when the *home negro*, an illegal immigrant who sells pirated CDs, runs out into the street in front of Ánxela’s car while fleeing from a police raid. This accident is described as something that “a enfronta subitamente á realidade” and as the beginning of the “diluvio que desexaba” (69); her

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<sup>59</sup> Ourense is well known for its thermal springs; this is one of the details through which Ameixeiras lends geographic specificity to his narration and allows for a dual reading of Oregón as Ourense and as City in some more abstract sense.

physical impact with the *home negro* renders her unable to remember what she had been thinking about, pulls her out of her self-absorption. While Jonathan Raban asks “If a city can estrange you from yourself, how much more powerfully can it detach you from the lives of other people, and how deeply immersed you may become in the inaccessible private community of your own head” (2), in Ánxela’s case, the city seems to cast the *home negro* into her path to bring her out of that self-envelopment. The man, who is mostly unharmed in the accident, becomes Ánxela’s connection to the anonymous urban crowd, his situation as an African immigrant links her to the city as a site of human migratory flows, his corporeality, the realness of his body colliding with her car seems to remind her that others exist, and that she herself exists. The *home negro* becomes for her a repository for her desire to feel that she can be seen, that she and her body are still real; this desire culminates in a scene in which Ánxela appears at the man’s apartment and, in front of him and his confounded housemates, takes off all of her clothes and asks that he talk dirty to her: “Dime algo sucio. Por favor” (172). By appearing naked before the *home negro*, Ánxela demands that he see her, that he perceive her as a feeling, sexed subject, while at the same time casting the man as the Other, a stranger brought into her path by the randomness of the city and whose gaze Ánxela requires in order to be restored, to emerge from the mental crisis, provoked by the end of a relationship, which has alienated her from herself and others.

The coming together of Ánxela and the *home negro* points to the heterotopic nature (Foucault “Of other spaces”) of cities; although space can be imagined as homogeneous, it is in fact multiple in the way it is lived and imagined. The experience of the *home negro* is colored by his anonymity, his marginalized position; he is a person for whom possibilities for fulfillment are foreclosed—his livelihood is illegal and he is constantly subject to police



raids. What is more, as black man in Oregon, his otherness is written on his body; as Rose Gillian has argued, when a subject's social attributes are inscribed on the body, the ability to participate in defining social spaces through the kind of poesis advocated by thinkers such as Tiwari, Lefebvre, and others is undermined because space is hegemonically white, bourgeois, heterosexual, and masculine (147). Thus, every morning the *home negro* wakes from a nightmare to find himself in another kind of nightmare, “atrapado nunha cidade cercada” (18). For Ánxela, although the city has been rendered *unheimlich* by her mental state, she remains a *citizen*, a person of the city. The *home negro*, however, is not, and for him the city can never be *heimlich*, homely. This contrast between the two is reflected in the description of the materiality of their apartments; Ánxela's new place has a kitchen that is “ampla e luminosa,” the bedroom is painted yellow, things are new, and there is a smell of paint (16), an olfactory index of the optimism that comes with a fresh start. Meanwhile the *home negro*'s building has a “fachada decrépita” and “soporta un forte cheiro a cloaca”; the stairway is “estreita e moi sucia” and the interior walls “locen grisallentas e con escarzas” (73). The building, like its inhabitants, is abject (Kristeva), *cast aside*; its stench offers a reminder of optimism's tail end, and its decrepitude is “the sort of materiality that traumatically shows you your own death” (Felluga, n.pag.).

Ánxela is thus architectonically linked with life, the *home negro*, with death. Indeed, by the end of the novel, Ánxela surfaces and begins to create new connections in the community—she responds to an ad for someone to provide elder care, and the novel ends with her introducing herself, an indication that her sense of herself has been restored, she is unique, named, a subject: “Viña polo do anuncio. Chámome Ánxela” (223). But while Ánxela's exhibitionist display before the *home negro* appears to mark a positive turning point

in her personal crisis, it seems to have the opposite affect on him; his next appearance in the narration is as he prepares his suicide, as if by seeing her naked body, her death drive has been transferred to him. In spite of Ánxela's need to be desired by him, in spite of her saving him from being apprehended by the police, he still has no name, only a label: *o home negro*. When he throws himself into traffic and is hit by a bus—echoing the collision that brought him and Ánxela together in the first instance—he is replaced by “outro home negro” (206), a fact which highlights his fungibility. While modern urban life has proven a trial for Ánxela, the fact that she emerges from her intersection with the *home negro* alive and with her identity intact points to the structural inequality between the global North and the global South within the globalized economy. By portraying the collision between these two characters, Ameixeiras articulates a layered critique of urbanized, globalized late-capitalism, on one level showing the ways in which the psycho-social repercussions of such system create “first-world problems”—such as Ánxela's depression and *desarraigo*—while on another level hinting at how the system creates “third-world problems” with vast human consequences. If, in Marta Segarra's formulation, “La conscience de soi existe par autrui: je me sens moi parce que ceux qui m'entourent me perçoivent comme un sujet autonome” (9), both Ánxela and the *home negro* are victims of modern spatialities that promote social atomization and isolation, a process that, paradoxically, degrades individual identity. In this way, Ameixeiras signals the importance of community, understood as the interpenetration of subjectivities, across geographical scales, from the apartment block to the globe, suggesting also the need for what the NGO Implicadas calls “alianzas coa cidadanía [...] do Sur para a superación da inxustiza planetaria da que todas e todos facemos parte (“Visita” n.pag.).

## The Consumer Body and The Body Consumed

The death of the *home* negro is part of a larger theme of death and violence in Ameixeiras's Oregón: beatings, murders, suicides, and mutilations almost too numerous to count pervade the narrative, creating the overwhelming impression that the city somehow *is* death. It is perhaps ironic that for a character like the urban teenager Laura, death should be imagined in the emptiness of her grandmother's village, which she finds "fantasmal," or in the sudden loss of her math teacher to pancreatic cancer, because in the fullness and thrum of the city, violent, intentional death is everywhere.<sup>60</sup> If in the villages "a morte é a lei da vida" (53), the city is a space where that law has mutated, where the balance between life and death seems to have shifted toward the latter. The city becomes a site of cannibalism, of death outside of the natural order of survival, where the logic of consumption comes to dictate relations between people. In *Dime algo sucio* this nefarious logic results in the rape and murder of a fifteen year old girl named Marta Nóvoa—also known by her internet avatar Cady, pseudonym which she adopts after seeing the 2004 film *Mean Girls*<sup>61</sup>—a crime, revealed in the earliest pages of the narration, that casts a shadow over the rest of the book and is therefore central to its mood.

In this section, I argue that Marta/ Cady's existence and the crime that ends it, when taken together, provide two extreme visions of the body in the postmodern consumerist city:

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<sup>60</sup> The characterization of the grandmother's village as "fantasmal" calls to mind Pena de Ancares, the ghost village of Borrazás's *Ser ou non* (Chapter 4) and raises the question of both individual and generational differences in the psychic importance of the village in the Galician imaginary. Although I suggest in the introduction to this chapter that post-rural *desarraigo* is felt in Oregón as a structure of feeling (and, as I have mentioned, contributes to Ánxela's troubled relationship with her own body, specifically her hands), for Laura, presumably born in the 1990s, the affective polarity of the village is notably negative; it is a place that offers only the vaguely *unheimlich* feeling of that which was once alive but is no longer. This is in contrast to the village as object of desire in *Ser ou non*; the existence of this contrast offers evidence that the ambivalent spectrality of the village in Galician cultural production offers avenues for further research.

<sup>61</sup> For clarity, henceforth I will refer to this character as Marta/ Cady.

Marta/ Cady's care, grooming, clothing, and fashioning of her body is deeply connected with the purchase and consumption of products, while the male (criminal) gaze transforms that body into a product that itself is consumed and discarded, establishing a motif of human disposability that recurs throughout the novel, a point I have alluded to in the above discussion of the *home negro*.

Our first experience of life in Oregón is one that highlights shopping. Through Marta/ Cady's first-person narration—she is the only first-person narrator in the book, an authorial move that gives Marta/ Cady's light and breezy subjectivity a place of privilege in the novel's structure—we are given a frank accounting of her experience buying and wearing intimate apparel. From the very beginning of the novel, Marta/ Cady conveys the depth of her involvement with consumer culture and how consumerism influences her experience of her own body. As she details her underwear collection and the process of picking out a new bra, she reveals that her experience of her developing body is colored by how well undergarments fit her; she seems to judge her body for its failure to match, for example, the available bras:

Pero non vexades o agobio que me entrou, porque tiven que percorrer toda a cidade para atopar un que me sentase ben. Levo un noventa e cinco e acabo de facer quince anos, e nalgunhas marcas véxome obrigada a pedir o talle cen. Son de pouco lombo, pero teño demasiado peito para a miña idade. (9)

The products seem to cause Marta/ Cady to judge her own body (“pouco lombo”; “demasiado peito”) but in the next breath she credits them with helping her to style and improve her body: “O mellor destes suxeitadores é que os aros non se moven nada, agarran moito e danlle unha forma preciosa ás tetas, que van subidas e perfectamente amarradas” (10). And in the same way that Marta/ Cady's experience of her body is tied to products and consumption, we also observe that Oregón, as Marta/ Cady experiences it, is reduced to that

which pertains to her role as a consumer. Her narrative voice gives no information about the spaces through which she moves—she has nothing of the *flanêur* or *dériviste*, nothing of García Canclini’s urban commuter—the city is not experienced except as an *agobio*, something tiresome that she must endure in the pursuit of consumer satisfaction.<sup>62</sup> The city, from Marta/ Cady’s narrative point of view, is a non-place (Augé); her world is constructed from the pleasures of commerce, such as getting a good deal—“atopei o que necesitaba por só trece euros. Estou contentísima” (10)—or enjoying the products—“[these undergarments] gústanme moito e vou supercómoda” (10). This sort of erasure of the city concords with the negative view of postmodern consumer society advanced by Guy Debord, who writes that “social space is continually being blanketed by stratum after stratum of commodities” which results in the “colonization of social life” (29–30). Ameixeiras’s omniscient narrator points out the materiality of this historical process in the following passage, which shows how consumerism overlays, supersedes and obscures older use patterns:

Durante séculos, o camiño do Vao serviu de paso para que moitos pobos atravesaran o río cando baixaba con pouco caudal, especialmente nos tempos en que a antiga ponte construída polos romanos permanecía en ruínas. Agora, ese mesmo camiño utilízase para acceder a un centro comercial. (116)<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The *flanêur* is associated with aimless wandering and disinterested observation of the urban scene; the *dériviste* seeks to “drift” through urban space, experiencing the city playfully, attending to its psychogeography, the different moods that seem to inhere in different spaces (See Pinder, Homes). García Canclini points out that long commutes provide residents with ample visual material from which to construct urban imaginaries (Homes).

<sup>63</sup> For information on the pedestrian bridge, and a critique, see Rosendo Pardo Castro’s article: <http://www.canedo.eu/colaboracions/pasarela.html>. Interestingly, Pardo Castro points out that “esta pasarela nun [sic] une dous espacios públicos entre ambas marxes do río, como farían en calquera cidade moderna. Non. O que une é unha rúa pública con un centro mercantil privado. Sen necesidade porque, partindo de onde sae na marxe dereita se, en lugar de ir como vai, variara só uns cinco graos cara o leste (4 metros ó final) desembocaría nun parque público, alí existente.” Pardo Castro’s comments point to compelling questions about urban planning: One can imagine the shopping mall developers lobbying the planning board for a bridge that would feed pedestrians onto their property, influencing people’s movements on an hodological level. In addition to its practical effects (funneling people to sites of consumption, rather than to a public park), this particular planning decision is emblematic of the fact that the built environment is never ideologically or politically neutral, but rather reflects and reinforces structures of power.

The colonization to which Debord refers is also evidenced by the fact that, throughout much of *Dime algo sucio*, Marta/ Cady's thoughts seem to have little or no connection to other subjects, she seems to live on an island where one's life can be perfected through the acquisition of the right products.<sup>64</sup> Marta/ Cady thus falls into the appearance trap described by Clay, et al., who write that "perceived appearance consistently emerges as the strongest single predictor of self-esteem among both male and female adolescents," going on to say that "this close association between body-image and self-esteem is especially problematic for girls growing up in the context of developed mass consumer societies" (452). Through the blanketing of social space by commodities and their associated imagery that Debord describes, the city becomes a substrate for messages that alienate subjects, not only from the city as a material space, but from their bodies and from other people. In spite of the fact that Marta/ Cady reports having a lot of friends and claims to be well regarded at school (89), the reader does not know the name of a single one of her friends or family members. By contrast, an accounting of what she carries in one of her eight purses becomes a stream of *brand* names—Roxy, Guess, iPod, Happydent, Nivea, Magnific Eyes, Mac, The Body Shop, Nokia, Lindt, Vispring, Tous (63-4)—as does a description of her exfoliation ritual—Deliplus, Exfotonic, Sephora, Yves Rochers, L'Oréal, Bourjois, Mercadona (130–1). By referring to each product by name, Marta/ Cady indicates a certain kind of familiarity or relationship with those products, often explaining how each one contributes to her personal care: "se noto que me empeza a ulir un pouco o alento, saco un Happydent de menta e xa está" (63); "Utilizo o exfoliante de aceite de árbore de té para a cara, o exfoliante labial que mercou a miña nai, e outro de pedra de pómez para pés" (131).

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<sup>64</sup> See Ritzer (2003) for an account of sites of consumption as "islands of the living dead."

Thus far we have seen that Marta/ Cady's first person interventions provide ample detail on the procurement and use of products for the styling and perfection of her body, while failing to elucidate her actual embodied experience in the city. This creates the impression that Marta/ Cady lives in a virtual space that parallels the city; this virtualization of the urban space is analyzed by Paul Virilio as "the transformation of distance and depth into pure surface, the reduction of space to time, of the face-to-face encounter to the terminal screen" (qtd. in Grosz 110): Rather than going out to exercise or practice sports with her friends, Marta/ Cady gets "un pouco de exercicio" playing games on her Wii console where she can "crear personaxes cos que xogar" (204); rather than consulting a parent or teacher about her social problems, she seeks emotional support in a DVD of *Mean Girls*. And her relationship with Eduardo, the only context in which we see her in conversation, is mediated through the internet.<sup>65</sup> This relationship modality allows them to "crear personaxes" out of one another; the lack of face-to-face contact allows each party in the relationship to have a vastly different experience of that relationship. This is particularly apparent in a scene where Marta/ Cady and Eduardo chat online; she treats him as a confidant, telling him about a past relationship, while Eduardo multitasks by watching porn on his computer, something he would be unlikely to do if they were actually together. Through a bit of bitter dramatic irony, the reader sees how Eduardo laments Marta/ Cady's ex-boyfriend's choice of Christmas present ("Que pouca delicadeza") while he watches a violent sex act taking place on screen.

But for as much as the novel seems to criticize tacitly Marta/ Cady's highly consumerized, mediated existence, the virtual flirtation she carries on with Eduardo gives her a sort of control that life in the city does not afford; as the third-person narrator observes "a

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<sup>65</sup> Eduardo is an older man with whom Marta/ Cady chats online; he serves as a red herring as the reader tries to predict who Marta/ Cady's murderer is.

rapaza manéxase con intelixente prevención” (48). Marta/ Cady denies Eduardo access to her image—“Nada de fotos. Nada de web-cam” (28)—, thereby protecting her identity and safety and allowing her to determine how permeable the barrier between online and physical existence will be. Her first step in allowing Eduardo to interact with her in the non-virtual world involves a sort of game in which she tells Eduardo that she will leave something for him in a grocery store locker. This game becomes highly erotically charged for Eduardo, in spite of the fact that the object in the locker turns out to be a plush cat toy. For him, the cat is an indication that “Cady” is not just an internet chimera, but rather demonstrates her corporeality, proving that “Cady existe, que vive nalgún lugar da cidade, que respira nesas mesmas rúas” (48). Just as Ritzer, following Baudrillard, sees McDonaldized sites as “islands of the living dead” stripped of risk and danger, and therefore of life (128–9), the online space shared by Marta/ Cady and Eduardo can be seen as a site where risk is managed but satisfaction is elusive; for the seduction to continue, it must break free from the virtual realm and take to the streets.

But for Marta/ Cady, hiding behind an avatar may be one of few ways to avoid the city’s relentless scopophilia, the male gaze that turns women’s bodies into objects of desire and consumption and that Ameixeiras reproduces repeatedly throughout the novel. In addition to the character of the *home da cicatriz*, a professional voyeur who photographs unsuspecting people throughout the city and is later revealed to be Marta/ Cady’s murderer, many named and unnamed male characters in the book are depicted observing women’s bodies in a way that casts them as objects of sexual desire. Eduardo, for example, thoroughly undresses a supermarket employee with his eyes, even though he cannot tolerate the feeling of being observed himself: “Tortúrao a sensación de estar sendo observado” (40); the taxista



observes a mother at a café: “Estaba observando esas pernas cruzadas baixo a mesa, sopesaba o volume dos peitos, imaxinouna espida” (78); Marta/ Cady’s transition from childhood to adulthood is seen by “ollos que contemplan ese tránsito fabuloso detrás das portas” (147).

So, in spite of Marta/ Cady’s efforts to control her image in the course of her online flirtation with Eduardo, in the streets, Marta/ Cady is visible to “moitos homes” (147), including the *home da cicatriz*, the pornographer who refers to her on the telephone as “*algo que vos vai gustar moito*” (156, emphasis mine). As the *home da cicatriz* directs his gaze at her, we witness how that gaze transforms Marta/ Cady into an object of consumption, even, perversely, links her image to the visual grammar of advertising:

Está seguro de estar presenciando os movementos dunha deusa formidable, emerxida dunha conxunción xenética afortunada. Marta Nóvoa, Cady sempre que ela quere, destaca sobre o grupo pola súa mirada lánguida, por esa complexión un tanto desvalida e por ese xeito de camiñar tan estudado. Unha brisa suave vén de sorprendelle os cabelos, que se botan cara atrás buscando o desenlace perverso dun anuncio de xampú. (156)

This scene links together Marta/ Cady’s body as an object and a target with the motif of clothing and personal care products, an association that exists from the beginning of the novel, where Marta/ Cady’s hyper-cared-for body is introduced in the first person (“*vou supercómoda*”), only to immediately be made abject in a third-person account of “*o corpo desa rapaza*” (11), the body of Marta/ Cady that has been raped, beaten, and shot dead, crimes that we later learn have been videotaped to be distributed as pornography. As readers we are left wondering what significance we might ascribe to this juxtaposition. Ameixeiras seems to be insinuating a critique of a culture in which the idea of (especially female) bodies as commodities, as objects of consumption, is normalized to such a degree that rape and murder as entertainment, while certainly shocking, can be seen as an extension of a more general process of commodification that operates at various scales of social space. Just as the

city seemed to consume the *home negro* by making him “other” and foreclosing his ability to live as an authentic subject, Marta/ Cady is consumed by the city’s pornographic gaze that reduces her to her body, which is dehumanized and rendered nothing more than a sex object while the *taxista*, Marta/ Cady’s unwitting rapist, is also dehumanized, his agency is subverted and he is turned into a weapon, a proxy phallus for the consumers of snuff pornography. Ameixeiras makes the case, albeit through hyperbole, that this dehumanization of the body of the Other is the consequence of living in a disordered socio-spatial paradigm which, as Lefebvre argues, is characterized by the hyper-visualization and de-corporealization of space (Pinder 139). The novel suggests that the visual consumption of women’s bodies through pornography and crimes such as Marta/ Cady’s rape and murder that fulfill a desire for ever more, and more debased, images of the female body, are not unrelated to the practice of objectification that forms part of everyday life.<sup>66</sup> While this process of the debasement of desire has elsewhere been treated with humor—as in the 2008 story published in *The Onion*, “Pornography-Desensitized Populace Demands New Orifice To Look At”—in *Dime algo sucio*, a visual culture saturated with images of the body is a factor, not only in body-image problems, but also in the creation of sexual dissatisfaction and sexual violence.

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<sup>66</sup> Ameixeiras’s rendering of the male gaze creates difficulties for the interpretation of the novel from a feminist perspective. The author presents the gaze as a vice that virtually all men engage in, but, in my view, far from naturalizing such public voyeurism, Ameixeiras shows that such behavior is no less creepy for being ubiquitous. The (especially male) tendency toward objectification is perhaps made more prevalent by the impersonal nature of urban life, in which bodies flow in and out of the subjects’ visual field, sometimes producing erotic desire; rarely are they seen as bodies belonging to people, embodied subjects. That said, the presentation of Ameixeiras’s book seems, perhaps, to have fallen into the kind of commodification of the body that the novel itself rejects: the cover of Xerais’s first edition of the novel shows a female torso, cropped at the neck, her breasts occupying the center of the image, the nipples, one of which is highlighted by an ink stain on the t-shirt, are clearly visible. The cover of Pulp Books Spanish translation is a campy version of classic pulp fiction cover and also features a female body cut off at the head, this time dressed in a school girl’s plaid skirt and knee socks. Whether these covers themselves are objectifications that offer titillation to the potential reader and promise erotic content, or whether they are meant as comments on such objectification is a question for further inquiry.

In such a culture, bodies are read as texts, the signature of which “cannot simply be identified with the proprietary mark of the author; instead it is the effect of the text’s mode of materiality, the fact that as a product the text is an effect of a labor, a work on and with signs, a collaborative (even if hostile) labor of writing and reading” (Grosz 20). On this view, regardless of how much the subject may want to force a given reading of his/her body, full control of how one’s image is read is impossible. Moreover, in the postmodern city, as a part of what Lefebvre and others term “the colonization of everyday life” (Pinder 133–4), the very act of self-fashioning—assumed to offer opportunities for agency and self-expression—is shot through with the discourses of consumerism, advertising, and the fashion media.<sup>67</sup> Marta/ Cady has internalized these discourses, thus calling into question the very possibility of authentic self-presentation; her interior monologue reads like advice from a women’s magazine: “Unha norma aceptada por todas: apostar sempre pola comodidade. Se o pantalón non me deixa respirar, nunca poderei resultar sensual nin atractiva”; “Un concello fundamental: confiar no meu estilo e non pedir roupa prestada” (175); “explotarei ese *touch* de misterio que levo dentro e non me amosarei como unha *fashion victim*”; “A cor branca sempre achega inocencia e frescura. O negro é elegante, suxire seriedade” (176). The need to be attractive, fashionable, and desirable is a Trojan horse smuggled in under the guise of self-confidence and comfort, and there is here an juxtaposition of a “be yourself” ethic with the message that just being yourself is not enough.

It may be tempting to analyze Marta/ Cady’s enthusiastic participation in consumer culture as the cause of her death; in telegraphic form, such an analysis would claim that by being attractive and well-groomed, Marta/ Cady draws attention to herself and becomes a

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<sup>67</sup> For a compelling account of the interpenetration of brand marketing and personal identity, see Sarah Banet Weiser’s study *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*. New York: NYU P, 2012.

victim. But like the “*ela ía provocando*” explanation of why rape happens, this analysis ignores the fact that the origin of violence lies in the structures of power that convince the perpetrators of violence that they have the right to harm others. Further, when we consider the fact that the taxi driver is also tortured and killed as part of the same crime that claims Marta/ Cady’s life, the message that comes into focus is that whether or not you are young and beautiful, whether or not you wear the latest fashions, in Oregón—a metonym of the consumerist city and the consumer economy—you are always already trash.<sup>68</sup>

### **Signs of Life**

As we have begun to see, these novels present the city as a space of objectification and violence in which people’s bodies, their gaze, and even their internal dialogues, are colonized by consumer culture. These themes combine with the familiar tropes of urban fiction such as crime, the underworld, the depersonalization of space, and the breakdown of social relations, to create a nearly dystopian view of the postmodern city where people relate to one another more as objects than as thinking, feeling subjects and individuals are alienated even from themselves. In the remainder of this chapter I argue that in spite of these novels’ at times overwhelming darkness, the author leaves small chinks in the city’s grim façade where small seeds of life seem to take root. I conclude that because suffering is the dominant mode of being in Ameixeiras’s city, even small ways of resisting that suffering take on importance. If, to paraphrase Judith Halberstam, suffering is always joined to the narratives of the resistance it inspires (18), my aim here is to highlight those narratives of resistance, showing

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<sup>68</sup> Along these same lines, Pope Francis has written that in a consumer society “Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded. We have created a ‘disposable’ culture which is now spreading. It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new. Exclusion ultimately has to do with what it means to be a part of the society in which we live; those excluded are no longer society’s underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised — they are no longer even a part of it. The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers’” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, paragraph 53).

how, through the assertion of personal and community agency, Ameixeiras's characters counter the dystopia in which they are immersed, creating what Luce Giard calls "microfreedoms" (Giard "Gesture Sequences" 213).<sup>69</sup>

Through the character of Laura in *Dime algo sucio*, Ameixeiras offers a counterpoint to the alienated, doomed urban adolescence of Marta/ Cady. Laura's is a life of rich, textured experiences that are often strongly tied to the body and to the urban environment; the reader first encounters her in a kung fu studio, a setting that allows the narrator to emphasize various aspects of Laura's corporality and how her physical experience is integrated with her sense of self. Although Laura's body is described in aesthetic terms from without—"Ten un corpo atlético, estilizado"; "Acáelle perfectamente o pelo devastado sobre os ombros" (13)—her experience of her body from within is also important: "Os seus ollos concéntranse no coiro e reitera os impactos extraendo a forza das paredes do abdome, sentindo a enerxía que atravesa os músculos dos brazos" (13). This kind of description—muscular prose *onde a haxa*—points up the contrast between Laura and Marta/ Cady; through the intensity of her athletic practice, Laura seems to occupy her body in a deeper way, feeling her body from within while also gaining a greater sense of her objective self. Looking in the studio mirror after everyone else has gone to the locker rooms, Laura repeats "Esa son eu [...] O meu nome é Laura" (14). While the demonstrative "esa" seems to indicate a strange distancing, a breakdown in the coherence of Laura's identity, in fact Laura's realization of herself as an object leads to a heightened self-consciousness, an altered state that allows her to experience the city differently, and even seems to influence how others see her:

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<sup>69</sup> Halberstam's exact words are these: "capital is always joined to the narratives of the resistance it inspired, even though those resistant movements may ultimately not have been successful in their attempts to block capitalism" (18).

Cando remata as clases e camiña pola Avenida de Portugal sente o corpo conectado coa mente, o ánimo disposto e unha feliz solemnidade que se lle instala en todas as accións que acomete. Algunhas veces séntese observada, coma se todas esas caras anónimas coas que se cruza lle envexasen a enerxía e a forza. (14)

Because Laura is able to feel and see her body within its social context, she is also able to own it. The city may be estranging, but Laura's martial arts practice allows her to counter that tendency, neutralizing the forces of de-corporealization that would conspire to make of her life an abstraction. The reader feels that Laura inhabits the city, that she dwells in it; through her eyes we see the details and the textures of the city: the "persianas enferruxadas" (20) of the Pozo do Inferno, the "paseatas dos xubilados e ás carreiras nerviosas dos nenos" (173); she attends to the city's semi-private spaces that are full of life in all its unpolished splendor, like the back patios where "florece roupa íntima nos tendais e ole a cea requeitada" and one can see "un vello espido que se abraza cada noite ao mando a distancia" (173). Laura's city is a space where it is still possible to be without a goal, to not be going anywhere, to "[dar] voltas sen rumbo" (173), a contrast to the consumerist norm of directed, productive activity.

Although Laura clearly exists within the same consumer culture as Marta/ Cady, and even uses many of the same products (iPod, cell phone, and Happydent gum), Laura and her boyfriend Nelson cultivate a certain countercultural, anti-consumerist image in their dress and body modifications, as well as through their practices. Laura is sometimes shabby, with pants whose cuffs are shredded and gray from grazing the ground; Nelson has a barcode tattooed on his neck, an ironic commentary on the commodification of the body. Laura and Nelson also engage in acts of creation that in some way subvert or resist capitalist logics; Nelson is a graffiti artist and as such converts municipal and private property into a substrate

for his art, while Laura makes her own tie-dye shirts that “Quedan mellor que esas que venden en Bershka” (19), an activity that can be read as motivated in part by a DIY (do it yourself) ethic that places value on self-reliance and on subverting the cultural bias towards relying on commercially available products and leaving things to the professionals. This ethic is shared by Laura’s father, a *bricoleur* who makes Laura a punching bag out of things they have lying about the house: he asks, “Para que mercalo, podendo fabricar un aparello similar con un pouco de paciencia” (222), illustrating that DIY is a tactic of freedom, occupying what Judith Halberstam calls “the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop” (2).

Just as admirable as Laura’s ability to navigate consumer culture without being consumed by it is her ability to experience sexual pleasure within a culture in which sex is most often violent, coerced, abusive, or spiteful. In this context, the fact that Laura and Nelson actually enjoy sex seems significant, even counter-cultural. When compared to Rosa, who reports that sleeping with her boyfriend causes her “tanta rabia e tanta mala uva” (115) or with Andrés, who uses sex to abuse and humiliate his wife, Aurora, Laura and Nelson’s sexual relationship reads like a vindication of pleasure. Ameixeiras depicts their union as rough, but still consensual, and Nelson takes pleasure in Laura’s willingness to challenge him despite his greater strength. They are both at ease in their bodies, which feels nearly miraculous in the context of these novels. Even so, Ameixeiras doesn’t fall into the trap of idealizing the two as innocent young lovers; neither of them is a saint, their relationship is messy and therefore escapes being schematized. Nelson, for his part, is cheating on Laura with her best friend, Antía, and Laura, perhaps sensing that something is going on, pressures Nelson for assurances. But the portrayal of Laura is nuanced; even if Laura experiences

insecurity in her relationship with Nelson, she is also aware of her attractiveness and sexuality, performing psychic jujutsu on the ubiquitous male gaze by seeing her position as an object of desire as also being a position of power, as the narrator reveals: “Gústalle provocar esas sensacións nos homes e tomar o control cando preme a tecla nerviosa que todos comparten” (88).

Laura is only one of the female characters in the Oregón novels who finds ways to contest male power. At times, though, this resistance is severely attenuated, as when, in *Historias de Oregón*, two women recognize that one of their neighbors, Aurora, is being abused by her husband. The two women discuss how Aurora’s husband controls how she spends money, and they see the signs of physical abuse, such as when Aurora wears large sunglasses to cover her eyes and when she walks with a slight limp. While it is true that they don’t offer to help Aurora in any way, in Ameixeiras’s Oregón, a place in which people often feel anonymous and isolated, and in which any sense of community that may have once existed is deeply eroded, the fact that the women even know Aurora by name and see her as real person capable of suffering seems radical, a sign that fellow feeling and community are still possible. But for as much as Aurora might be part of a neighborhood, the defining space of her life is the home, a space that is nested within the public space of the neighborhood but impervious to it. Aurora’s friends do not know the extent to which her husband abuses and humiliates her in almost every possible way, and keeps her in a kind of domestic slavery where she lives to clean his house and prepare his meals. When Aurora sees a television ad directed at an idealized housewife—“Está cansa de usar coitelos que non cortan? Está farta de que uns coitelos desafiados arruínen unha cea especial?” (*Historias* 80)—, the commercial message seems to lodge in her psyche, only for Aurora, it is not dull knives or a botched



dinner party she's fed-up with, but rather her abusive husband and her life of subjugation. Aurora, who has been contemplating suicide, discards that option and instead kills her husband in premeditated attack using the very mail-order knives that were advertised as a solution for more mundane hardships. Significantly, the anonymous medium of television is able to enter Aurora's private space although her neighbors cannot, bringing the idea of vengeance right into her living room and the murder weapon right to her door. Aurora's attack is described as "rápida e sen concesións," an epic victory in which Aurora "fende o pescozo do monstro" (82), affirming her agency and confronting the monstrous male body that was the source of so much suffering for her, symbolically destroying the vicious male sexuality that pervades Oregón. As unlikely as it seems upon rational reflection, the death of Aurora's husband seems to open up the possibility that Aurora will be able to reclaim the domestic space which her husband had turned into a private hell.

Aurora's will to live suggests that life can triumph in the darkest places, even where all options are foreclosed save violence and come down to the disjunctive of *it's either you or me*.<sup>70</sup> Another example of life managing to emerge from the darkness of violence in *Historias de Oregón* comes when a multi-national immigrant community, led by women, takes up a collection to repatriate the remains of Diana, a young Brazilian prostitute murdered by a client. Significantly, this is an ad-hoc community, made up of Venezuelans, Argentines, Senegalese, Brazilians, not held together by a single language or a shared history, but rather by the experience of being outsiders in Oregón, together on the losing side of the power asymmetries summed up in the phrase "dos mundos que se odian porque se tocan" (*Dime*

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<sup>70</sup> This disjunctive invokes the film *Thelma and Louise*, a work with which *Historias de Oregón* engages in an explicit intertextual dialogue around the theme of inter-gender violence, the discussion of which is outside the scope of this chapter.

*algo sucio* 146). This antagonism is embodied by Camélia, Diana's roommate, also a prostitute, and her client, a wealthy building contractor from whom she steals a substantial amount of money to contribute to Diana's repatriation fund. (In a symbolic act of emasculation, she also steals his pants.) While they can never bring Diana back, and in fact do not even succeed in getting her body sent back home, their show of solidarity feels heroic in the context of the Oregón novels, as it is quite literally the only example in these works of people acting in concert and in the spirit of altruism, for the benefit of the *other*, thus exemplifying Bell and Newby's concept of community as communion.

In reading Ameixeiras's Oregón novels, we come to expect darkness, and as I have just intimated, it is really only in this context of darkness that the more optimistic moments I have been discussing even register as such. Although these novels derive much of their narrative force by engaging directly with the most dystopian aspects of contemporary life, one also finds in their social criticism evidence of a certain kind of utopian impulse. Raffaella Baccolini has argued that recent dystopian science fiction, in contrast to earlier works such as *Nineteen Eighty-four*, has begun to "allow readers and protagonists to hope" (520) thus opening itself up to readings that recognize the "utopian impulse" (520) that forms a part of such works. As dystopian *urban* fictions, *Dime algo sucio* and *Historias de Oregón* participate in this aperture; while not resolving into a shining major chord, both novels, with their ambiguous, open endings, reject, as Baccolini puts it, "traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel" and open "a space of contestation and opposition" (520). Ameixeiras succeeds in creating an aesthetic and moral readjustment in the reader: from this shifted perspective, a prostitute stealing from her client or a woman murdering her husband are paradoxically uplifting events, productive of what Judith Halberstam calls "a new kind of

optimism” not one that “insists upon the bright side at all costs” but instead “produces shade and light in equal measure and knows that the meaning of one always depends upon the meaning of the other” (5). For all of the killing, the alienation, the dissatisfaction, and myriad other social ills that saturate the every fiber of Oregón’s social fabric, the reader still comes away believing that, like the camellia that blooms in the Galician winter, in Oregón there are glimmers of hope, that it is possible (and necessary) to push back against patriarchy and consumerism, possible to care for others, possible to live in a city that is less Raban’s “emptiness and fog” and more a site of *poiesis*. In this sense, Ameixeiras rejects what Rábade Villar has called the discourse of resignation, opting instead for a “discurso da promessa” (*Fogar* 45); to the degree that Ameixeiras’s work demonstrates Michel de Certeau’s assertion that marginality in today’s society is “massive and pervasive” (xvii), it also ratifies Rábade Villar’s claim that “a literatura producida dende as periferias culturais confirma que a utopía non é unha vía completamente morta” but rather a “mecanismo de cuestionamento das pretendidas lóxicas *globais*” (*Fogar* 50, emphasis in the original). In the next chapter, I will discuss how María Reimóndez’s vision of Galician urbanity also participates in the “discurso da promessa,” presenting Vigo as fertile ground for engaged, creative living while at the same time linking it rhizomatically to rural Galicia and to a broader cosmopolitan world.

## CHAPTER 6: MARÍA REIMÓNDEZ'S *EN VÍAS DE EXTINCIÓN*: LANGUAGE AND THE ECO-POETICS OF EMPLACEMENT

I argued in Chapter 5 that in spite of the fact that Diego Ameixeiras's vision of the city is predominantly dark, inflected by death and alienation, the author also indicates that urban life also contains seeds of resistance. In this chapter, I read María Reimóndez's *En vías de extinción* as a novel that cultivates those seeds, re-imagining the city—among other geographies—as a potential site of microresistances and microfreedoms. The novel, published in June of 2012, quickly became a best-seller among Galician-language titles; part of the novel's success is surely due to its positive, constestatory, mobilizing message, a message that reflects ethical commitments that subtend various aspects of Reimóndez's work as a writer, translator, scholar, and activist. Although the novelist rejects such terms as “novela de tese” or “novela ideolóxica,” *En vías de extinción* is clearly a novel of ideas and one with political aims, among which we may include increasing the visibility of sexual minorities, promoting ecological consciousness, defending Galician as the *lingua propia* of Galicia, and more generally, exalting the values of difference and social justice.<sup>71</sup> In my analysis, I focus on two major ways in which Reimóndez's novel links these political goals

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<sup>71</sup> Reimóndez rejects labels such as “novela de tese” on the grounds that they are generally pejorative and are deployed by powerful elites as a strategy for “marcar o diferente”—a strategy Reimóndez notes is frequently applied to feminist discourses (Vidal “A literatura narra”).

with discourses of place: in the first section I explore how the novel foregrounds language, especially as a reflex of place and as a coordinate of identity. I argue that through this attention to sociolinguistic factors, especially language variation and language choice, Reimóndez not only portrays the sociolinguistic realities of present-day Galicia but also suggests linguistic praxis as the cornerstone of a progressive, cosmopolitan Galician nationalism. In the second section, I focus on the novel's use of botanical and terrestrial metaphors in the articulation of multiply-emplaced identities and in the construction of a specifically Galician cosmopolitan sensibility.

### **The Place of Language and the Language of Place**

Gaia, the protagonist of *En vías de extinción*, is a subject who can be described as cosmopolitan, modern, and multilingual; at the same time, Gaia identifies strongly with her rural upbringing and her status as a native speaker of Galician.<sup>72</sup> Gaia, like Reimóndez herself, is a translator and interpreter by profession, and *En vías de extinción* is a novel in which language, especially as a social and political phenomenon, is often foregrounded, a process that often takes the form of allowing languages and dialects to coexist within the novel's discourse. By rendering the novel in standard Galician, while at the same time allowing English, Castilian, German, and dialectal forms of Galician to enter the novel, Reimóndez allows the reader to feel the linguistic textures of social discourse and to inhabit the intellectual universe of the novel's polyglot protagonist.

One example of the multilingual technique is found in the novel's rendering of Castilian dialogue without italics, which serves to reflect the bilingual conversations that form part of Galician sociolinguistic reality. Reimóndez rejects the common practice of

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<sup>72</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I will refer to the protagonist as Gaia, the name she chooses for herself as a young woman. Mariña is her given name.

Galicianizing dialogue which, in an extraliterary context, would likely have one or more of the interlocutors speaking Castilian.<sup>73</sup> Galician scholar Elías Torres attributes this unwillingness on the part of Galician authors and publishers to allow Castilian into their books to a feeling of insecurity that permeates the Galician literary system (Torres n.pag.). Reimóndez's novel shows none of this insecurity, as it fully acknowledges the existence of Castilian while at the same time defending Galician as the *lingua propia* of Galicia and presenting Castilian-speaking Galicians as self-alienated subjects. In an inversion of current rhetoric which accuses proponents of the normalization of Galician of trying to “impose” Galician on a society that does not want it, the novel offers Gaia as an example of a speaker who identifies Castilian as the imposter and herself as an “Angloparlante nativa. Galegofalante nativa (paleofalante?). Falante de castelán por imposición da escola” (25).<sup>74</sup> In this context, the presence in the narration of Castilian—and of strongly identified Castilian speakers—often serves as an opening for Gaia's aggressive defense of Galician, as in one scene in which Gaia responds to her classmate's accusation that Galician is a language full of invented words.

Here her classmate, Laura, speaks first:

—Mujer, pero beirarrúa no te existía.<sup>75</sup>  
 —Tampouco televisión, non te esfolo. O que pasa co galego é que a xente coma ti, fóra a ialma, sodes uns putos ignorantes.  
 —¡Gaia! [...] Vaya boca que tienes...

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<sup>73</sup> This practice sometimes creates jarring effects. In Domingo Villar's Leo Caldas novels, for example, Caldas's assistant Estévez, a native of Aragón and newcomer to Galicia, speaks perfect Galician even as he demonstrates a humorous lack of understanding with respect to Galician culture and society.

<sup>74</sup> “Paleofalante” is a play on “neofalante”, which refers to speakers who learn Galician as a second language. While entertaining as a ludic term for “native speaker”, “paleofalante”, has a double connotation: it evokes the transmission of Galician over the centuries to the present day, while at the same time suggesting the geologic past, a past with little relevance to the present.

<sup>75</sup> This dialogue offers an example how Reimóndez uses Castilian to produce a critique of linguistic self-alienation. Laura uses a dative of interest: “no te existía”; given that the use of such datives is rather more common in Galician than in Castilian (Reimóndez “re: dúbida lingüística”), Laura is portrayed as failing to recognize the ways in which Galician—for her an invented language—actually inflects her Castilian.

—Teño a boca pra dicilo que me peta. Xente que non sabe o que é tolleiro ou landra ou deica ou encetar ou cómaro ou fochanco ou nobelo ou o demo maior veñen dicindo, esas persoas, vós, que non tedes puta idea, que «el gallego es inventado». Ide facer unha inmersión lingüística, hostia. E de cando en vez lede o puto dicionario, que o María Moliner tédelo máis sobado ca un vello o instrumento pero o Xerais non sabedes de que cor ten o lombo, ilustres tradutoras do futuro. (42)

Here as elsewhere, Gaia pushes against the idea of *bilingüismo harmónico* (Regueiro), pointing out that if, even among language professionals such as translators, the legitimacy of Galician is questioned, harmonious bilingualism is a chimera, a language planning ideology that can only lead to the greater and greater undermining of Galician.

If, as Teresa Moure writes, Galician is “unha lingua acantoadá polo poder” (*Queer-emos* 47), Gaia, as a persona who claims being a Galician-speaker as a central aspect of her identity must be understood as pushing back against power, specifically against the linguistic hegemony of Spanish in Galicia. This resistance is manifested with particular clarity when Gaia agrees to appear on a Spanish gossip show to discuss her relationship with MK, a successful Scottish musician originally from Tamil Nadu, stipulating, however, that she will only do so in Galician. By taking this position, Gaia, who is perfectly able to speak Spanish, presents herself as outside the Spanish cultural field and entitled to the same accommodations normally extended to non-hispanophone guests. And while the television producers oblige, providing an interpreter to facilitate communication between Gaia and the Castilian-speaking television presenters, the hosts seem not to have put in their ear pieces, symbolically rejecting Galician (linguistic) difference; the narrator suggests that the interviewers are convinced that Galician is nothing more than badly spoken Old Spanish, little more than a dialect, and therefore a thing of no importance (323). Gaia points out the error of this assessment simply by speaking an undiluted form of her native language: when Gaia

uses the adverb *engorde* (“slowly”), the interviewer’s linguistic hubris is exposed as she fails to understand the word. But Gaia refuses to self-translate, to cede linguistic territory; as the narrator comments “ela ten vocabulario abondo e non ía facer esforzos comunicativos, non ía reducir o seu uso de vocábulos, como facía en Vigo tantas veces naquilo que ela chamaba «thinning»” (323).

In this way, the very linguistic form of Gaia’s intervention on Spanish television not only affirms the existence of the Galician language, but also constitutes a refusal to participate in linguistic self-mutilation. Gaia uses her verbal acumen to go on the offensive, injecting the discourse of stateless nations and ex-centric identities into the “corazón” of the Spanish media. When asked regarding her relationship with MK, a famous singer, “¿Y qué tenéis en común?,” Gaia uses the question to move away from the personal realm of sentiment to the realm of geopolitics: “Pois temos en común que as dúas procedemos de nacións con cultura e lingua propia que viven oprimidas por un estado, por exemplo” (261). And later, when the interviewer suggests that Gaia is eccentric, Gaia flouts the cooperative principle (Grice 26) and flips the question on its head: “Os centros só me interesan nas lavadoras, polo de centrifugar a xeito. Os centros teñen a tolleitez de pensaren que son o mundo inteiro cando en realidade o ven todo a través dun funil mui mui miúdo. As ex-céntricas somos conscientes de que hai mundo alén do noso lugar” (325), thus playing with the idea of political centers while at the same time vindicating individuality and personal eccentricity.

But if Gaia casts Spaniards as persisting in a pre-Copernican belief of their own centrality, she also reacts to what she perceives as Galicians’ loss of their own center, often indexed as a loss of their linguistic competence. Of Aurora, a native of Lugo whom Gaia



meets in Madrid, the narrator observes: “Fala un galego xa moi perdido, case castelán, cun forte acento catalán. A Gaia recórdalle os taxis que retornan á vila polo verán dos centos de emigrantes. Hai algo aí que lle provoca dano aos oídos” (47). This process of individual language attrition, often connected to physical displacement from the homeland, is experienced by Gaia as an affront on a physical level (“lle provoca dano aos oídos”). Buried in this almost visceral reaction, however, is a kind of sadness, a lamenting of the uncountable geographic movements and personal, social, and economic reasons behind them, that conspire toward language attrition on a grand scale. But in spite of Gaia’s distaste for attenuated, castilianized forms of Galician, Reimóndez’s novel largely resists becoming an elegy for something lost, like Aurora’s Galician. The work offers itself, instead, as a forum that responds to language attrition by foregrounding oral language and non-standard, geographically-specific dialectal forms. Gaia, as an interpreter, is deeply attuned to this co-indexing of language and geography, a fact reflected in her love of isoglosses: “dubida que haxa alguén a quen lle presten máis as isoglosas. Porque son lingua falada, lingua viva. A lingua da que ela vive” (22).<sup>76</sup> For her part, Reimóndez has remarked that *En vías de extinción* is in part an effort to return to the deeply local character of spoken Galician, specifically to that of her own family from the Ancares region, and to make language variation within Galician visible in a literary context (“Entrevista a” n.pag.).

This reclaiming of geo-linguistic specificity is one response to the thorny question of language standardization. Some speakers, like the character of Laura in the novel, reject standard Galician as a technocratic invention (sometimes called *galego de laboratorio*); this rejection drives continued language shift in favor of Castilian. The objection to standard

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<sup>76</sup> Isogloss: “a line on a dialect map marking the boundary between linguistic features” (“Isogloss” n.pag.).

Galician may also lead to a vindication of the kind of spontaneous language that regards language planning as, at best, a fool's errand and, at worst, as an act of aggression. As internet user Sgan states, astonished that other users want Galician translations of software (or, to use a geographically suggestive term, *localizations*),

Queredes Galego????[...] non me mola un carallo o galego de hoxe en día, evos un galego de laboratorio, iso e querer cambiarlle a xente a forma de falarmos por collons... involucionar a lingua... Todas as linguas do mundo evolucionan adquirindo os modismos, variantes, novas palabras, estranxerismos, etc, etc... e a nos, por contra, quitannolo a hostias os se~nores da Real Academia Galega... toulle collendo asco a lingua, por culpa dos neogaleguistas "juais"... e coma min moitos, asegurovolos... tan conseguindo o contrario do que pretenden. (n. pag.)<sup>77</sup>

Reimóndez's novel proposes a third way, in which cultivation of standard Galician is important—recall Gaia's urging Laura to study the Xerais dictionary—but which also proposes local dialects as an antidote to the spiritual malaise caused by technocratic, official Galician.

In a way that is perhaps counterintuitive, Reimóndez's use of dialect is aesthetically effective precisely because it is able to push against normative Galician and provide a contrast to it. Antón Figueroa has written that a writer working in a standardized language "pode en cada caso escolle-lo grao de imprevisibilidade que quere, e intentar conscientemente provocar no lector determinados efectos estilísticos, en relación precisamente co uso normal da lingua" (*Diglosia e texto* 91). For Figueroa, writing in 1988, this level of stylistic control is difficult to achieve in Galician, owing to its (then) limited degree of standardization; I argue, however, that a text like *En vías de extinción*, written more than twenty years after Figueroa's *Diglosia e texto*, enters the Galician literary system

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<sup>77</sup> I reproduce Sgan's message verbatim; abbreviations and missing accent marks are thus in the original, perhaps owing to the fact that, as Sgan formulates in postmodern *galeguinglés*, he finds himself "con teclado ingles dende unha distro live! sorry!" (n.pag.).

at a time when the widespread adoption of standard Galician—whatever else one thinks of it—allows local dialects to be deployed as contrastive stylistic elements without creating what John Thompson, following Figueroa, calls “distorsions” (“Galizan” 109) and “potential obstacles of authorial control” (“Galizan” 107). Thus, because the matrix language of *En vías de extinción* is standard Galician, Gaia’s home dialect (ancarés), when it appears in the narration, serves as a kind of geo-tag that immediately locates the action within the microgeography of Gaia’s home village.<sup>78</sup>

In some sense, though, the long-term viability of a novelistic method that requires authors to dig deep into their own local linguistic heritage (as Reimóndez and other contemporary authors such as Anxo Angueira have done) may be among the cultural practices that *En vías de extinción* reveals to be *on the road to extinction*. Pemón Bouzas, the host of the television program *Eirado*, praises Reimóndez’s use of various dialects and registers, stating that it “serve para enriquecer[...] a literatura galega neste momento,” while at the same time speculating that the author uses rural language at least partially “porque pode” (“Entrevista a María Reimóndez” n.pag.). Bouzas’s implication here is that only an author with connections to rural Galicia would have the linguistic background needed to enrich Galician letters in this way. Bouzas thus creates a link between the geo-linguistic life experiences of the author and her ability to create artistic products with a certain *denominación de orixe*. The novel itself makes a similar claim about place-based subjectivities, advancing *terroir* as determining factor in identity formation: upon visiting Gaia’s home village for the first time, MK remarks that “Unha persoa coma ti só pode saír

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<sup>78</sup> I direct the reader to John Thompson’s dissertation “Galizan Civil War Novels”, in which he explores Anxo Angueira’s use of dialect in *Pensa Nao* (1999), a novel whose dominant narratorial voice speaks in Manselle dialect, thus, in Thompson’s words, “making a local, marginal dialect the norm” (109) and exerting “centrifugal force against the *normativa oficial*” (109).

dun lugar coma este” (390), a comment that leads Gaia to reflect “con fonda tristura que polas trazas que levan as cousas no mundo cada vez quedarán menos lugares coma este e polo tanto menos persoas coma ela. Ou ningunha” (390). If certain subjectivities are the product of rural experience, the novel suggests, and if rural spaces are disappearing, those subjectivities—as well as their sociolinguistic correlates and the artistic expression that they engender—must also be endangered. As I discuss later in this chapter, this attachment to origin is a central preoccupation of the novel itself, one that is frequently expressed through the botanical metaphor of roots.

Given the theme of rural language and culture on the road to extinction, how does Reimóndez’s novel avoid falling into an elegiac, nostalgic mode? One answer is that, in spite of the related processes of urbanization and language attrition—both individual and collective—the novel presents non-native speakers (*neofalantes*) whose use of Galician has little to do with origins and everything to do with choice, affective relationships, and agency. Gaia’s neighbor Tom, for example, is a native speaker of English who speaks Galician with great ease and naturalness, having acquired it, presumably, through his partner Doris. At the same time, Tom’s Castilian is weak; unlike many foreigners whose entrance into the Galician linguistic and cultural field is through Spanish, Tom “nunca aprendeu propiamente o castelán” (19), a fact which is evidenced when, in a deliciously playful multilingual scene, he tries to defend a young Mariña (Gaia) from a group of condescending *madrileñas* who address her as *galleguiña*. “Drop dead,” responds Mariña, to which the girls riposte, “Ay, pobre, no sabe hablar...” But it is Tom who doesn’t know Spanish: “Si, sabe *fablar*, en varios idiomas, indeed!” (19, emphasis mine). The fact is that although we might imagine that Tom is perceived back home in Scotland as living “in Spain,” in a certain sense this is not really

the case. As I argue throughout this dissertation, scale is important: Tom's life as a foreigner in Iberia cannot be fully understood without zooming in to the microgeographic scale of the house and village. It is in those environments that Tom acquires his linguistic competence in Galician and at that level that he is inscribed into the social system of his adopted home, a fact made plain by Tom's mispronunciation of *hablar*, one of the highest frequency verbs in the Castilian language.

Two characters—Nina, a Swedish exchange student in Vigo; and a troubled youth Gaia meets in her neighborhood, identified only as *o mozo*—offer further examples of the novel's positive view of *neofalantes*. *O mozo* confides in Gaia that he is experiencing alienation from his family and friends, in part because of his choice to become a *neofalante*. He explains that he came to be ashamed of having spent “toda a vida falando castelán, de ser de aquí e non saber falar un carallo de galego” (304). Gaia encourages him to become the master of his own life (306), clearly indicating that she views his linguistic choice as part of that process of self-determination. The symbolic importance of becoming a *neofalante* resides in the agency that is required to do so; while the linguistic identity of a *paleofalante* like Gaia is seen an outgrowth of socio-spatial *données* such as her place and family of origin, the merit of the *neofalante* is that s/he makes a conscious, sometimes difficult, choice in favor of Galician.

As for Nina, the exchange student, her Galician, although shaky, is viewed in positive terms as “un galego simpático” (242) spoken with an accent that gives Gaia pleasure: “gústalle de veras” (242); in light of the Nina and Gaia's sexual congress, this pleasure even takes on erotic overtones. And while Gaia expresses personal appreciation for the effort Nina makes to address Gaia in her own language—effort, once again, being a virtue of the

*neofalante* and a mark of her agency—, this appreciation transcends the personal. For Gaia, the Galician language is “único ben común que nos define como algo no mundo” (90); she rejects all other coordinates of identity—geography, cultural practices—and posits the Galician language as the sole basis for Galician identity: Here Gaia wonders what makes people think they are Galician:

Comer lacón con grelos? Bailar a muiñeira? Que poña no DNI que naceron en La Coruña? Pois sinceramente a meu entender nada diso define ser galega, ser galego, pero a lingua si. E dende esa definición tanto ten que unha sexa negra ou amarela ou que o seu pasaporte poña que naceu en Tombuctú: falas a lingua, es galega. (90)

The Galician language is a web that connects all speakers—regardless of where they have their roots—in a transnational *galeguidade*.

Gaia, thus, imagines the Galician language as a unifying force, a utopian view that is perhaps meant to counterbalance her own negative experiences as a Galician-born English speaker of Scottish English. In spite of her linguistic competence, she is not accepted in Scotland, where a girl tells her directly “You’re foreign” (338). Gaia’s response to this affront occurs on two levels: While her outward response is to reaffirm her Scottishness: “I’m as Sco’ish as you are” (338), she inwardly understands that Scottishness is more than a linguistic phenomenon: “nese momento soubo que por moito que ela teimase, nunca sería aceptada de todo, por moito que unha quixese ser dun sitio, os sitios tiñan formas moi sutís de cuspir xente fóra” (338–9). Here, the spatial concept of “sitio” links in-group membership to one’s origin—to the notion of *being from a place*. This is what Gaia cannot change about herself, and the Scottish girl exploits this weakness: “You smell foreign, you look foreign, you *are* foreign, foreign” (339, emphasis in the original). In this context, Gaia’s affirmation “falas a lingua, es galega” can be seen as a call for Galicians to reject the xenophobia that she

herself has experienced, on the condition that outsiders accept Galician as the *lingua propia* of Galicia. At the same time, Gaia's own recognition that identities do not rest solely on language choice calls into question this project of inclusiveness, a point to which I will return in a moment.

Part of Reimóndez's declared project in *En vías de extinción* is to "dar a voz a quen supostamente non a ten" and "reflexionar un pouco sobre precisamente a visión moitas veces máis complexa de quen está na periferia e quen está no centro" through the character of Gaia who "está nesas marxes pero que non acepta esas marxes e se fai centrar" ("Entrevista" n.pag.). The novel celebrates coordinates of identity such as being "do monte" and "lesbiana," and in so doing works against what Kirsty Hooper describes as "the elision of almost all marks of difference, including differences of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality" (*Writing Galicia* 23) that has often characterized Galician literature.

At the same time, by making the use of the Galician language a litmus test for Galician-ness, the character of Gaia applies a *criterio filolóxico* to identity, effectively othering Castilian speakers in Galicia. Hooper argues, following Rábade Villar, that attempts to create and maintain a master narrative of Galician identity have often obscured the existence of coordinates of identity that are not easily integrated into that master narrative. Hooper also points out that "in Galicia, extraordinarily high stakes are invested in the strongest of these markers [of identity], language, which has become the centrepiece of debates about how to define and delimit Galician culture and identity" (*Writing Galicia* 18). The character of Gaia, then, participates in this delimitation of Galician identity, classifying those who fail to use Galician and to defend its use as "animais" (90). Although this judgment is offered as part of a rhetorical exercise, not without a certain satirical tone, it

nonetheless expresses a firm belief that any Galician who does not at least try to cultivate Galician language skills is not worthy of the name.

This problem positions *En vías de extinción* at the crux of the language debates in Galician society, especially the debate over the notion of *bilingüismo harmónico*, also known as *bilingüismo equilibrado* or *cordial*. Manuel Regueiro, writing in favor of the concept, describes the situation in Galicia as one that

acepta a promoción da lingua propia, pero non quere, en xeral, a merma da lingua común de relación en España. Promoción do propio e cooperación no común son as dúas bases dos desexos lingüísticos da xeneralidade do pobo galego. A conxunción destes anceios poden atenderse no desenvolvemento social do bilingüismo harmónico. (1141)

Critics of harmonious bilingualism, on the other hand, hold that the idea, while sensible on its surface, is actually pernicious to the normalization, even the survival, of Galician; Miguel Moreira Barbeito contends that behind policies that emphasize bilingualism “se agocha un non tan encuberto monolingüismo español con ansias imperiais” and that proponents of such policies “anhelan unha presunta igualdade entre as linguas, mal chamadas, cooficiais” (2). Following García Negro, Moreira Barbeito argues that such equality between languages is virtually impossible and, further, that proponents of bilingualism understand this fact, pursuing such policies with a view toward ultimately achieving a “presenza mínima do galego” (2). As Kirsty Hooper writes, the policy of harmonious bilingualism pursued for much of the last twenty years “deliberately neutralized questions of power and influence” between Castilian and Galician, effectively promoting the retention of “Spanish as the language of power while allotting Galician the role of ‘domestic’ language” (*Writing Galicia* 22). For Galician nationalists, this bilingual (or more precisely, diglossic) situation is unacceptable, and thus “só cabe defender para o galego a alternativa do monolingüismo



social. [...] calquer concesión ao bilingüismo, calquer presenza promovida do español como acompañante forzoso, será lesiva para a lingua danada, o galego” (García Negro 286-7, qtd. in Moreira Barbeito).

According to Moreira Barbeito, defenders of Galician must take up “unha actitude de cambio, positiva e máis combativa” (1); if Gaia seems not particularly *cordial* in her approach to Castilian, it is because she embraces this combativeness, in the belief that the promotion and protection of Galician must supersede the promotion of bi- or plurilingual cultural spaces, a belief she expresses with a botanical analogy: “unha póla, unha folla, unha flor, poden morrer e nada lle pasa á árbore. Pero as raíces teñen que estar, por definición, vivas” (358). Gaia rejects arguments such as “hablando español te entiende todo el mundo” (90) or “«el gallego no vale» cando vas fóra” (90) on the basis that they are indicative of a lack of social will to improve one’s “país e contorna inmediata” (90) and that they encourage speakers to conceive of the future in terms of an “emigración a un abstracto «fóra»” (90). Here the cultivation of the *lingua propria* is seen as intimately connected to the defense of place. Seen in this light, Gaia’s linguistic prejudices—such as her aversion to Alicia’s “castelán coruñés,” a language variety that “a pon demente” (41)—begin to seem less like aesthetic judgments, taking on instead an eco-ethical dimension. In other words, Gaia views the use of Castilian as contributing to linguistic pollution that threatens the native linguistic ecosystem.

A very similar view is reflected in the rhetoric deployed by the non-profit citizen’s group A.C. Almuinha and others who make an analogy between the eucalyptus, a non-native species that now dominates in many forested areas of Galicia, and Castilian as a kind of

linguistic invasive species. Arguing against the idea that Galician is being “imposed” in Galicia, A.C. Almuinha’s website states,

[...] a pesar de ser o galego a lingua propia e natural do país, sucede como no noso medio ambiente, que estragamos até tal punto que consideramos propios os eucaliptos que substitúen os nosos bosques autóctonos. Con todo, seguen sendo as nosas carballeiras, os nosos soutos, as nosas fragas, os nosos ríos e a nosa lingua o natural na nosa terra e por iso cómpre coidalos para que non desaparezan na voráxine dunha mal chamada globalización e dun falso progreso. (“Na Galiza o galego é natural” n.pag.)

Here, acceptance of the eucalyptus—and Castilian by analogy—is linked to self-alienation and the abandonment of autochthonous culture. But the problem can also be stated in positive terms: If, as the editors of the periodical *Sermos Galiza* have written, the Galician speech community is an “ecosistema delicado” (“Falantes” 8), a constant effort must be made to maintain and gain speakers, an effort which they argue depends on a basic principle: “Falantes Fan Falantes” (“Falantes” 8). This principle is a recognition of the fact that, for an endangered language to survive, it must be spoken as much as possible, by any many people as possible, in as many social domains as possible. In light of this, Gaia’s negative attitude about Castilian—and her positive view of *neofalantes*—is entirely logical: every word spoken in Galician is a word not spoken in Castilian, the language that most immediately threatens the native linguistic ecosystem.

Reimóndez has stated her belief that all languages are important, emphasizing the fact that she herself is multilingual. Even so, for Reimóndez “as linguas [...] só valen no seu contexto” going on to say that she chooses to live in “o contexto no que se fala galego” (“Ecolingüismo” n.pag.), which she associates with progressive politics and a respect for diversity. By yoking together progressive values and the use of Galician, Reimóndez implies that Castilian is out of context in a progressive Galician milieu, not in terms of sociolinguistic

reality—there are certainly Castilian-speaking progressives in Galicia—but because defense of the *lingua propia* is considered a central point of articulation for liberal values. On this view, the failure to defend Galician means that “non hai xustiza posible” while, conversely, simply by speaking Galician, one is contributing to “un mundo mellor” (“Ecolingüismo” n.pag.).

Reimóndez’s discourse points to the ways in which the articulation of place must always contend with the gaps between the empirical present and possible futures. In this context, the inclusion of Castilian dialogue in the novel—relatively rare in Galician letters, as I mention above—shows Reimóndez’s willingness to steer right into the gap. In other words, while the novel militates for a Galicia in which everyone speaks Galician, it depicts a social reality in which this is not yet the case. Even so, Gaia, as the avatar of a future Galicia, never speaks a word of Castilian, a fact which can only be rendered because the novel strategically avoids Galicianizing the interventions of Castilian-speakers. Far from weakening the Galician-ness of the text, this technique has the paradoxical effect within the novelistic space of making Castilian into a minority language relegated to the margins. If the narrative casts Castilian-speaking Galicians as schizophrenic, alienated subjects who, for example, take up the bagpipes and tambourine but fail to cultivate their linguistic heritage (97), it also proposes a possible future in which such subjects will rediscover their roots, turning to the Galician language as a way to create for themselves more coherent, authentic identities. Reimondez has proclaimed her interest in creating a literature that eschews “identidades centrais” and explores identities that go against the grain of dominant discourses (Vidal). As part of this project, *En vías de extinción* challenges Castilian-speakers to become *ex-céntric@s*, to view their language as a factor pernicious to diversity and to examine their role

in creating and perpetuating “a situación de desequilibrio lingüístico en que sobrevive o galego” (Moreira Barbeito 10).<sup>79</sup>

So far I have looked at the ways in which *En vías de extinción* foregrounds language in order to enact a defense of Galician as the *lingua propia* of Galicia. If, as Xosé Carlos Caneiro has written, Reimóndez’s novel represents “a contemporaneidade da literatura galega: vizosa, ampla, cosmopolita, internacional sabendo ser nacional” (Caneiro n.pag.), it does so, in part, by positing local identity and local language as the primary, foundational elements that must be in place for cosmopolitan, international identities to be meaningful.<sup>80</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore the ways in which the novel uses metaphor to explore locality and to move between the local and the cosmopolitan.

### **Of Trees, Roots, and Earth: The Poetics of the Grounded Subject**

In the articulation of her public persona, Reimóndez deploys arboreal imagery to convey a vision of personhood in which actions are the *outgrowth* of beliefs: the author’s twitter profile declares “interpreting, translating, writing and working in development are my leaves. postcolonial feminisms and Galician nationalism are my roots” (“María Reimóndez” n.pag.). By the same token, the author affirms the importance of roots to her aesthetic and ethical project when she addresses her readers of her novel in the acknowledgements,

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<sup>79</sup> While there is much to be celebrated in the novel’s project of playing with established notions of centers and peripheries, giving voice to subaltern identities, it is worth asking whether this project also risks relegating the Castilian-speaking but Galicia-identified subject to an “unspeakable home” (Rábade Villar), an *unheimlich* space. Hooper argues in *Writing Galicia* that the *criterio filolóxico* and the “reformulation of Galician cultural history as a teleological, monolingual narrative” has resulted in the exclusion of “a generation of largely bilingual writers” (22) from that narrative. While Hooper’s argument is oriented toward cultural history, we might also be concerned with the subjective experience of Castilian-speaking Galicians in a territory imagined as monolingual in Galician.

<sup>80</sup> Compare, for example, Yuan Yuan’s analysis of Ibn Hassan’s postmodern self that “refusing the desire for center or home [...] travels [...] without the concept of nostalgia for home as origin, but simultaneously at home everywhere and nowhere” (332).

inviting them to become part of the forest she has imagined, “as árbores dun bosque de esperanza” (394), in which each act is grounded or rooted in abiding conviction and belief, “[p]orque as persoas somos raíces” (394). In the foregoing discussion of the place of language in *En vías de extinción*, I make passing reference to aspects of the work’s rhetorical apparatus that draw on the language of ecology, botanical metaphors, and the notion of *terroir*. I will focus now on this aspect of Reimóndez’s discourse in order to demonstrate not only the central role they play in the structure, ethics, and aesthetic texture of the novel, but also how they are deployed in the construction of Gaia as a cosmopolitan subject with a complex personal geography of emplacements and displacements.

Let me turn first to the notion of *cerna* (heartwood), a botanical metaphor used in articulating the macrostructure of the novel. The narration is organized in seven parts, each of which is named for a species of tree or shrub: *Toxo*, *Abeleira*, *Uz*, *Carballo*, *Acivro*, *Pradairo* and *Castiñeiro*. Each part, in turn, is composed of a central chapter titled *Cerna* around which are arrayed a chapters titled *Veta* (ring or layer of material), which are numbered outward from the *Cerna*. The *Cerna* chapters all recount a central event in Gaia’s life, mostly taking place in her home village in a rural area of Lugo province.<sup>81</sup> This structural conceit yields subtle yet significant aesthetic effects. Since the *Cerna* chapters are embedded within multiple *Veta* chapters, and since they generally take place at a distance—both temporal and spatial—from the present day, the result is that the reader is periodically re-immersed in Gaia’s formative experiences. Because of this cyclic structure, the reader, like Gaia herself, is never far from the point of origin, never far from the places and the people that represent her *cerna*, the hard core of her being. In this sense, Gaia appears to be a traditional, centered

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<sup>81</sup> One of the *cerna* sections takes place in Scotland, the home of David and Jane, Tom’s parents, who are like grandparents to Gaia.

subject; as Suso de Toro outlines “Na sociedade tradicional eses son os dous trazos que che fornecen identidade: a pertenza a un lugar e a unha xente (Pedrós Gascón 75-6). But, in another sense, the novel presents the *cerna* as a place that transcends centers and peripheries, one in which “non hai xogos nin trampas nin cartóns nin rexeitamentos nin centros nin periferias” (389). If the novel presents Gaia as a liberated subject, it is because of, not in spite of, her origins in a place that is “como estar fóra do mundo” or “plenamente dentro da terra” (389); one of Reimóndez’s achievements in this novel is that she rethinks the disjunctive between being defined by one’s origins and being free to grow outward and become something new.

The metaphor of heartwood is intimately related to that of roots, which constitute the mechanism by which the *cerna* of identity is anchored to a place. Throughout the novel, the language of roots (*raíces*, *(des)enraizar*, *radical*) is deployed in relation to human subjects to refer to that which is both foundational and essential to continued survival. For example, Gaia’s *rootedness* often takes on an ethical dimension, and is adduced as an explanation for her ability to take up unpopular positions and withstand social pressures, such as when, in a public discussion on ecology and citizenship, she presents a feminist perspective that is largely rejected by those assembled, a group of self-congratulatory ecologists. After the event, talking with a woman who is perhaps her only sympathizer she states: “creo que se unha persoa é intelixente ten que ser feminista. Iso ou ten malas intencións” to which her interlocutor responds “Carai, que radical”. Playing with the word “*radical*,” Gaia seems to brag: “Si, teño as raíces ben plantadas” (288). In a similar way, Gaia’s roots are credited with protecting her from the difficulties of social life when she enters university: “séntese a salvo de moitas cousas por ser montañesa e por ter unha mai detrás para falarlle do mundo e non

deixarse levar por miraxes. Ten as raíces ben asentadas, diversas e únicas. Decátase pouco a pouco de que bota en falta a aldea, á que só pode volver de tarde en tarde” (28). This faith in roots not only informs Gaia’s understanding of herself, but also becomes a regular feature in her discourse with others. For example, when she befriends *o mozo*, the troubled young *neofalante* she meets in her neighborhood, she explains to him that the most important thing is that “as persoas teñan as raíces ben postas [...] e sexan capaces de procesar a merda de cada día sen botarlle enriba aos demais” (305–6). And when Gaia’s lover, MK, states “desterráronme axiña” (69), referring to her displacement as a young girl from the Indian State of Tamil Nadu, Gaia tries to encourage her to reconnect with her former home invoking the importance of roots: “Toda árbore precisa raíces” (69).

Through the novel’s inclusion of speeches that Gaia pens as rhetorical exercises, the reader sees that roots are not merely a trope she deploys to make colorful conversation. In one of her texts, Gaia theorizes roots as an antidote to nostalgic, inauthentic ways of engaging with the past: “A nostalxia é o contrario da memoria política. A nostalxia fainos esquecer con todo ese mofo e couza que o pasado é raíz do presente” (358). On this view, nostalgia is process of separating the past from the present and turning it into an aesthetic object, “unha peza de museo inmóbil e baleira” (357). So, although the novel’s repeated use of root metaphors has a literary, at times almost mystical, effect, its purpose is not primarily decorative. Instead, rootedness is seen as both a personal and political necessity, an individual and collective connectedness to a place and to the past.

The metaphor of rootedness, when understood in the most literal sense, tends to evoke unity, continuity, fixity, and to suggest the idea of being of and in one place. But, as I cite above, Gaia conceives of roots, somewhat paradoxically, as “diversas e únicas.” The

novel acknowledges that rootedness, for human subjects at least, is complicated, and that the metaphor begins to break down if examined too closely. MK observes to Gaia, “Raíces, que complexas poden chegar a ser. Ti semellas telas profundas no chan pero a combinación do teu aspecto e do teu acento, como me pasa a min, non deixa saber de onde” (69). MK is referring here to the fact that both women speak English with a Scottish accent, while neither conforms to stereotyped expectations of Scottish physiognomy. The reasons for this disconnect lie in each woman’s particular life story, in the migratory movements that have influenced their identities. As I mention above, MK is Tamil Nadu born, but raised in Scotland, while Gaia was born and raised in Galicia, she has a close relationship her Scottish neighbor Tom, who has spoken English with her throughout her life, and who has sent Gaia to spend several summers in Scotland with his parents. As Gaia puts it, “o meu acento vén máis de vivir Escocia comigo que eu en Escocia” (68). Their accents are strongly associated with a place, a fact that is emphasized when Gaia pauses to *place* MK’s accent, “a súa orella demora no acento de MK, Escocia central, e sorri” (65); and yet their accents seem challenge the very idea of roots, resulting as they do from processes of displacement or deracination.

In exploring the language of roots in *En vías de extinción*, one interpretive strategy may be to examine how this language differs from the novel’s other botanical metaphors. Madhu Dubey, in her analysis of Octavia Butler’s *The Parable of the Sower*, analyzes the metaphor of roots as one “which consolidates cultural and ancestral traditions as bulwarks against modern urban forces of displacement” (110); Dubey contrasts this fixity with the metaphor of the seed, which she analyzes as a means of focusing on “mobility across space” (110). While seed metaphors are few in Reimóndez’s novel, when they do appear they are linked to movement, creativity and an ethic of transformation. For example, Gaia finds



lucidity and receptivity in rising early, when her mind is “disposta a acoller e deixar agromar no seu interior todo tipo de semente” (124). Here, the seed of thought moves toward Gaia, implanting itself in her and giving rise to intellectual creativity. But Gaia herself is also presented as seed who arrives in Vigo “rodando coma unha abelá” (125), a seed in movement but in search of a new emplacement. To offer one final example: when Gaia describes her desire to be an agent of ecological consciousness in the city she is “agochada como a semente que agroma cando chega a primavera”; here the role of the seed is as an intermediary able to “[transgredir] as fronteiras entre o cemento e as árbores” (131), just as Gaia’s personhood transgresses the boundaries between urban and rural, I point to which I will return.

If seeds indicate motion, however, when we examine the metaphor of branches (*pólas*), we see a reassertion of the notion of fixity. In the context of Gaia’s first sexual adventure in the city, she briefly experiences sexual euphoria as lightness, as if she were a leaf “levada nas mans do vento” (117), only to reaffirm her stability: “Mais ela non é unha folla, é unha árbore sólida e estende as súas pólas ao redor dese corpo miúdo que ten o privilexio de poder tocar, bicar, gozar [...]” (117). Here, the leaf metaphor is explicitly rejected, and the embrace of Gaia’s branches is *rooted* in her condition as solid tree. Significantly, though, Gaia’s sexuality, which is presented as a part of her solid arboreality, only achieves full expression in the city, at a geographical remove from her village; thus hinting at the idea that for people, unlike for trees, the pursuit of plenitude often requires *raíces diversas*, which often come about through displacement from the point of origin.

Although the metaphor of rootedness is often difficult to square with the geographical displacements that characterize individual lives, many scholars have embraced the rhizome as a counter-metaphor (Deleuze and Guattari, Glissant, Clarke). Etymologically a “mass of

roots” (“ρίζωμα”), *rhizome* denotes “subterranean stems such as bulbs, tubers and couchgrass, with a multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, different from roots and radicles which tend to grow by means of binary divisions” (“Rhizome” n.pag.); in social and critical theory the rhizome is used in thinking about movement, connections, transformations, emergence, and related phenomena. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004) propose that rhizomatic thinking allows a shift in emphasis from discreet points (emplacements) to lines or flows (displacements), from the disjunctive to the conjunctive. According to Deleuze and Guattari, in an “arborescent” model, “the tree or root [...] plots a point, fixes an order” (7). It becomes clear that this plotting and fixing is, for Deleuze and Guattari, rather undesirable:

We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes. (15)

Beauty, for Deleuze and Guattari, lies not in roots or trees that occupy a point in space, but in a rhizomatic connection among points: “any point in the rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (7). Under the influence of Deleuze and Guattari, the repeated praise of rootedness we find in *En vías de extinción* begins to feel sinister as one contemplates the possible negative connotations of being rooted, plotted, fixed in place, and to what degree such processes impose limits on Gaia’s (or any subject’s) process of becoming. In a sense, the idea of one’s identity being rooted in a place evokes the specter of spatial determinism (see Chapter 4, especially my discussion of Ching and Creed’s *Knowing Your Place*), the notion that the geographic and social milieu in which one is raised determine in an enduring and immutable way who one is.

Indeed, even before arriving in Vigo, Gaia recognizes the importance of establishing a new identity and, by renaming herself, attempts to deracinate her old, beleaguered identity as “Mariña a da casa de abaixo” (384). If, as Suso de Toro states, the house “de quen es” is one of the primary coordinates of traditional (Galician) identities; by changing her name, Gaia partially cleaves herself from her place-based identity and symbolically comes to identify with the Earth as a whole, a rhizomatic move that marks her entrance into adulthood as a subject with connections to multiple places and people. For Gaia, the solution to the feeling of being over-determined by her circumstances, her strong mother, and her rural ways is ultimately not to reject her origins—in spite of being “farta de ser quen era, de ser sempre a lenta, a parva, a rara, a excluída” (384) she knows that “tampouca quería ser como o resto” (384)— but rather to craft a conjunctive identity, an identity of *and*. In Deleuze and Guattari’s words, “The tree imposes the verb ‘to be’ but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, ‘and ... and ... and...’” (25). In this sense, Gaia rejects the disjunctives of rural or urban, traditional or modern, crafting an identity that disrupts such binaries. But as is clear from the novel’s persistent deployment of root metaphors, the existence of the rhizomatic ‘and’ does not ultimately entail deracination, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it: “This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb ‘to be.’ Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions” (25). But for Gaia, these are not useless questions; in spite of her branching connections, her travels, and her multilingualism, hers is not a decentered identity, but rather a deeply rooted one that, at the same time, does not preclude connections to the global rhizome or the creation of new nodes of growth. In light of this, Gaia’s establishment of a new emplacement in Vigo, described in the novel as a process of setting down new roots (125), can be seen

rhizomatically as a kind of *vegetative reproduction* (“Vegetative Propagation” n.pag.) of her rural self, in which part of her mass of roots breaks free and gives rise to new growth in a new location, leaving the original root mass intact.

So, if I presented the rhizome as a counter-metaphor to the root, it can also be a co-metaphor; as Simon O’Sullivan writes, “Not the rhizome versus the root (no dualities) [...] the two are entwined; the rhizome in the root and the root in the rhizome” (89). Even Deleuze and Guattari, at times so hostile to roots, acknowledge the coexistence of the two structures: “a new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 9, qtd. in O’Sullivan 89).

As a translator and interpreter, Gaia embodies many rhizomatic virtues: she is multilingual, she connects people, she is international and trans-local, for her travels take her from Vigo to Santiago, and farther afield to Madrid, Barcelona, Germany, Scotland, England, and India. In some sense, this cosmopolitan existence is in tension with her rural identity; although Reimóndez has described Gaia “un personaxe [...] pouco civilizado” (“Entrevista a” n.pag.), Gaia’s profession requires that she become urban and to a certain degree, urbane. For this reason, Gaia’s move to Vigo to attend university is a major rhizomatic event, a deterritorialization that involves the creation of a new node for Gaia’s identity. This displacement entails movement across a variety of symbolic frontiers: from rural to urban, from a firmly Galician-speaking space to a Castilian-dominated one, and from the interior to the coast. This last movement is significant in the context of what Santiago Jaureguizar has characterized as the geographically uneven distribution of cultural capital in Galicia, a situation which means as a writer “se vives nas provincias de Lugo ou Ourense, non agardes unha chamada” (Lourdes Varela n.pag.). By moving to Vigo, then, Gaia begins to situate

herself along the Atlantic axis (as I mention in Chapter 4, 75% of the Galician population lives along the Ferrol-Vigo corridor). Indeed, Vigo becomes the cartographic pivot between Gaia's home in Lugo and the rest of the world. And significantly, it is a city that she perceives differently depending on where she is coming from: when she first arrives from Lugo, she finds that "non había verde para o que mirar" (30), while later, returning from Germany she observes "o verdor tan diferente da terra" (240).

Unlike the character of Manuel from Suso de Toro's *Calzados Lola* (1997), whose displacement from Galicia to Madrid Nathan Richardson describes as being "marked in fact by an intense desire to abandon his provincial background, including mostly successful efforts to drop his telltale Galician accent" ("Stereotypical" 578), Gaia's approach to living in Vigo bespeaks a desire to remain firmly anchored in her place of origin, while finding reflections or echoes of that home within her new urban environment:

Hai días nos que a luz entra así pola ventá e parece que o mundo nace de novo. Fóra canta un paxaro, é domingo e a luz baixa do inverno debuxa reflexos nos cristais dos edificios que rodean a casa onde vive. Son estes os días nos que semella que unha pode vivir á marxe de todo, na soidade máis plena e absoluta. (365)

Here, Gaia attends to the sights and sounds of the city in search not of the hustle and bustle normally associated with it, but rather of a sense of solitude that echoes rural life. In the same way, Gaia appreciates the University of Vigo's position outside of town, in what people call the "monte"; she takes in the site of the villages that lie just outside the city "esas aldeas tan diferentes á súa" (26) and, at times, turns her commute into a hike, forgoing the bus in favor of a three-hour journey on foot during which she is able to "meter os pés no verde e no lama [mud]" (27).

This contact with mud not only indicates physical contact with the soil and therefore symbolically with rural life, but also contributes to the complex earth and soil metaphors in the novel. Most directly, the word *lama* echoes what Adela, Gaia's mother, sees upon giving birth: a newborn girl "chea da lama do seu corpo" (171). This image, in turn, forms part of a frequent motif of the human body as part of the Earth, as when Gaia's mother confronts own death, peaceful in the knowledge that "a fin de contas somos parte da Terra e simplemente volveremos a ela" (226) or when Gaia herself affirms "estou convencida de que a terra nos puxo aquí como esterco e pouco máis" (271). Finally, of course, as we are constantly reminded by Gaia's name, the novel sets up an equivalence between Gaia and the Earth which begins even before Gaia is born, when her mother feels "como se a terra enteira lle estivese xirando dentro do bandullo" (171). When Adela dies, Gaia carries out her wish that she be allowed to "volver á terra sen ataúdes e sen cementerios" (235); Gaia herself digs the grave at the base of an old oak, physically immersing herself in the earth, in the soil that will reclaim Adela's body. When she emerges "chea de terra ata o pelo, cos pantalóns vaqueiros e a camisa de cadros de estar na casa irrecoñecibles entre tanto terrón" (235) and proceeds to "botar terra sobre a terra" (235), filling in the grave.

This physically immersive experience of burying the dead, of being covered in dirt to the point of becoming unrecognizable, of fully recognizing the fleeting nature of the body, is rare for modern people—rural or urban—, and is an example of why Gaia, while associated with the rural, is far from representative of it.<sup>82</sup> Gaia's experience of rural life is in many

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<sup>82</sup> Adela's burial contrasts with the post-rural burial in Borrazás's *Ser ou non*, in which the narrator, having resolved to bury Aurora, finally fails to do so—"Á fin non lle dei terra [...] ¿que terra ía dar?" (182)—after which Aurora's phantasmal body seems to disappear without a trace. In some sense, though, both burials reflect what Rafael Dieste refers to as Galicians' "furor ontolóxico" (see Chapter 4), a desire of things to exist

ways pre-industrial, even pre-modern, and therefore not typical of the contemporary rural experience: her mother is a luddite who rejects farm equipment such as tractors and milking machines, refuses to have a telephone, forgoes medical care, makes soap from home-rendered fat, and knits sweaters of raw wool that Gaia's schoolmates complain "fede a becho" (103). Gaia's life is atypical also because her surroundings are as socially progressive as they are technologically regressive; hers is a family bound more by affect than by blood-ties, where there is no *paterfamilias*, and where a rebellious, anti-authoritarian spirit is manifest. Her mother, especially, is the embodiment of a host of values and practices that counter common stereotypes of rurality, for example in the extent of her knowledge: "a pesar de vivir no medio do monte súa mai seguía sendo a persoa máis informada que coñecía. Tom traíalle libros ata da biblioteca de Lugo e ela [Gaia] chegara a ir á universitaria de Santiago fotocopiarlle artigos de bioloxía" (228). While rarely leaving her property, Adela imports knowledge from the urban centers which she cultivates without any desire for profit or prestige, much the same way she cultivates her land with no interest in creating a surplus to bring to market. In this way, although Adela is "cultura," she maintains a unidirectional relationship with the city as the place where, as Carlos Fernández has written, "a cultura aflore" (368). Adela consumes knowledge without fully participating in the culture through the process Fernández describes as "saír dun mesmo e da propia comunidade de orixe [...] para recibir, captar e recrear as posibilidades que o mundo ofrece [...] de formar parte da totalidade do mundo desde a fidelidade concreta á propia procedencia" (Fernández 368). Adela is a radically emplaced subject who, once having escaped a repressive family of origin,

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independent of their outward appearance. In this way, a refusal to monumentalize the dead is an assertion that only through traces left behind in the bereaved, in the *ser doutros seres*, is true perdurance possible.

is content to live microgeographically in and around her home: “nin viva nin morta súa mai quixera nunca saír da casa de abaixo” (240).

When viewed alongside Adela’s fixity, Gaia’s rhizomatic nature becomes clear. Gaia comes to believe that she is needed in the city, “un algo necesario á súa biodiversidade” (125). In specific terms, one of the things Gaia brings to the city is a sense of outrage over what she sees as the “perfil cimenteiro da cidade” (126) with its plazas given over to automobile traffic and no longer apt for human interaction.<sup>83</sup> Gaia seeks to counter this hyper-edification of the city by planting trees as a “green guerrilla” (75).<sup>84</sup> As part of her mission, Gaia undertakes a new cartography of the city, setting off on foot with her dog to locate spots where new trees can be planted. Whereas a map like the *Mapa callejero de Vigo* (“Mapa callejero” n.pag.) emphasizes commerce and the locations of concrete parking facilities that support it—“Comerico de Vigo” the map announces, “Todo Ventajas”—, Gaia’s project can be seen a counter-mapping (Peluso) that emphasizes the rifts and fractures in those “mil quilos de formigón,” creating an alternative representation of the city from the perspective of the pedestrian who seeks to make the city more beautiful and enjoyable. Gaia views this project as an urban adventure “desas que só un elemento da natureza coma ela podería levar a cabo na compañía dun animal” (127), emphasizing again the unique qualities that she believes she brings to the city, and tacitly criticizing autochthonous urban dwellers’ alienation from nature and calling for them to serve as agents for the improvement of their

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<sup>83</sup> This echoes the common belief that cities have become dehumanized. Ernesto Sabato, for one, has said “Yo cada vez más a medida que pasan los años pienso que el porvenir de la humanidad no va a estar en esas atroces megápolis en que vivimos y sufrimos sino que, por decirlo así, se volverá a hacer ciudades en el campo, quiero decir pequeñas comunidades que tiene el alcance de las manos y los pies del hombre. Si no, el hombre se convierte en un robot, en una abstracción” (“Ernesto Sabato”).

<sup>84</sup> Green Guerrillas is a New York-based non-profit organization dedicated to urban gardening whose first actions, in the early 1970s included throwing seeds onto vacant lots and placing flower boxes on abandoned buildings.



own environment and advocate for built environments—whether in the city or the country—in which the natural and the artificial come together. Gaia celebrates the University of Vigo as one such place, where there always exists “a esperanza de que en calquera recuncho a vida vexetal é capaz de abrirse paso” (27). By the same token, she marvels at Dundrennan Abbey in Scotland, where a garden exists within the walls of the ruined structure “como se o mundo vexetal enxertase un edificio” (318). Manuel Rivas has written that “los pioneros nacionalistas formularon la utopía de Galicia como una *ciudad-jardín*, asumiendo todas las ventajas de la civilización pero mimando la tierra y el mar como un vergel (*Galicia, el bonsái* 34). In this context, the oak saplings Gaia furtively plants around the city are her contribution to that garden-city of the future.

Gaia’s tree-planting project is one way in which the novel explores the contrast between nature and the built environment, an exploration that begins with the very cover of the novel. The cover art, designed by Noelia Fernández of the Desoños studio in Vigo in collaboration with Reimóndez (“re: Portada” n.pag.) shows the crown of a tree emerging from behind a rough concrete wall, the living tree appearing as the extension of a tree that is painted on the wall. Fernández suggests that one reading of this image is as a statement about Gaia, both as the Earth and as a character:

Gaia, deusa que encarnaba a Terra na mitoloxía grega, nace no principio dos tempos da profunda fenda que é o caos. O caos é a urbe, a contaminación, o cemento; alí onde Gaia, a protagonista, nace para actuar como elemento ecolóxico [...] Gaia é unha muller forte coma un carballo, coas raíces ben ancoradas na terra. Unha muller que, por moito cemento que lle boten por riba, loita e se resiste a ser domesticada; ao igual que a natureza, que sempre acaba facendo rachas no cemento para poder saír á luz. (“A portada” n.pag.)

Here, both Gaia and the Earth itself are portrayed in terms of their ability to resist the abuses—represented by cement—they are subjected to. The two Gaias are connected: Gaia,

the woman, is an oak with her roots sunk deep into the body of Gaia, the Earth. This connection defies the seemingly impenetrable barrier imposed by the urban built environment between people and nature. As the Earth “acaba facendo rachas” in that barrier, literally cracking the cement, Gaia, as I mention above, seeks to take advantage of those cracks, planting trees in them as a way of pointing to the soil that is always just below our feet.

Even as Gaia works toward the greening of the city by exploiting the gaps in the concrete, the novel draws attention to the dramatic *cementificación* that effects even the rural environment. If cement is a metonym of the city, or even more broadly of the twin processes of modernization and urbanization, the architectural *feísmo* that affects rural spaces is an example of what Amin and Thrift call “the footprints of the city” (1), an incursion of urban alienation into the country. Gaia laments the effects of this transformation on her home district, noting the “casas de cemento sen rematar, os horribles edificios de pisos que foran substituíndo as incríveis estruturas das casas de montaña” (381) and the pavements that little by little surrounded *a casa de abaixo*, “comendo o que a rodeaba e deixándoa nunha estraña illa” (381). In this way, the novel portrays the city and the country as existing in a chiasmic relation: While Gaia, symbol of the Earth and nature, moves into the city, urban concrete moves into the country.

To push the analysis to a greater level of abstraction, the novel seems to propose concrete as a symbol of power and Gaia as a symbol of resistance. If Regueira, following Foucault, writes that “na fricción entre resistencia e poder, é onde xurdirían [...] os verdadeiros motores dun cambio social” (n.pag.), Gaia, whose coordinates of identity include Galician-speaking, “lesbiana e do monte” (88), is a subject constituted along various fault

lines whose personality crackles with the energy released as power and resistance shift against one another. One graphic manifestation of this energy is the novel's depiction of the destruction of the Torre Toralla, a 21-story apartment building on Toralla island near Vigo that, in addition to being an eyesore and reminder of the late-Francoist enthusiasm for high-rises, has begun to appear in literary representations of the city such as Domingo Villar's 2006 detective novel *Ollos de auga*, where it is the scene of a murder. When MK—having used her significant financial resources to negotiate the purchase of the tower, its demolition, and the establishment of a land trust for the development of a public forest on the site—presents the building's destruction to Gaia as a birthday present, the narrator comments, “Na distancia, mentres elas brindan, o cascallo da torre de pisos comeza a caer aos poucos. Gaia non pode parar de rir coa realidade dos soños inexplicables” (190). This lopping off of an architectural phallus is a love letter to Gaia (double meaning intended), a castration that, paradoxically perhaps, imagines the Vigo coastline as an space resistant to mutilation, capable of healing. More than a desire for an unobstructed view from the nearby beaches, the destruction of the tower shows how sexual difference and environmental consciousness can push back at the structures—literal and figurative—of power, while at the same time exemplifying creative “degrowth,” an economically heterodox concept that encompasses the notion that true quality of life depends on more than the ability to consume.

### **Conclusion: Toward an Ecological Worldview**

Ultimately it is difficult to tease apart Reimóndez's use of botanical and terrestrial metaphors from her discourse on language; indeed, there are many points in the narration where the two discourses overlap: Gaia's linguistic presence in the city is described as “o verde da fraga” (126) and the bits of Galician that are still heard in the city from time to time

are *gromos* (sprouts) that remind people of “a terra que tiñan debaixo dos pés” (87). Of course, this combination of discourses is not unique to Reimóndez; Moreiras-Barbeito, for his part, likens the lack of care for the Galician landscape—where ugly buildings pop up like so many mushrooms—to a lack of care for the Galician language: “Do mesmo xeito que na paisaxe galega abrollan, como cogomelos no outono, exemplos de arquitectura antiestética, a lingua, como reflexo fidedigno da realidade, manifesta un estado de auténtico desleixamento” (9).

Moreover, in Reimóndez’s novel we find that discourses of nature, ecology and language are interwoven with questions of individual and group identity. The author’s grounding in feminist theory—in her opinion the most well-developed critical perspective from which to enact a “crítica á marxinalización, á desigualdade” (Vilalba 126)—leads to a work of fiction that is ecofeminist in the broadest sense. By this I mean that the novel draws a connection between environmental imbalances and social imbalances, between a lack of respect for the Earth and a lack of respect for the (sexual, linguistic, geographic) other. In this way, Reimóndez’s novel contributes to the construction of an ecological worldview—and the elaboration of ecology as a metaphor—that is increasingly present in Galician society and cultural production, from storytellers such as Anxo Moure to scholars such as Isabel Vilalba and María López Sánchez.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In my introduction I appealed to the notion of hodology, the study of the paths; the elaboration of the arguments of this dissertation follows a *chemin de désir*, an emergent path, not the product of a plan or design, but rather of a desire to get somewhere. In its earliest stages, this dissertation was conceived as a study of the subjective experience of place in recent Galician fiction, interested in phenomena such as topophilia or, as the narrator of *Ser ou non* would have it, “o fodido apego á terra.” To a great degree, this focus reflected my interest in space and place as part of a literary aesthetics rooted in the phenomenology of space, the study of the relationship between consciousness and the world in which it emerges. From the phenomenological perspective, the concept of space is inseparable from the subject’s experience of it, an experience which takes place “through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind” (Yi-Fu Tuan 18) and which consequently provides artists with an inexhaustible vein of aesthetic material to exploit. In reading the texts that would become the main corpus of this study, however, I found that my attention to the aesthetics of spatial representation led me to consider the political implications of these artistic strategies and the ways in which both subjective experience and its representation is embedded in social space.

This shift in my own approach is the origin of the microgeographic reading strategy I propose in this dissertation. The definition of microgeographies that I have proposed—“aestheticized representations of the highly individual ways in which places are lived,

experienced, and contested”—is meant to suggest an interdependence between formalist and political readings; in the foregoing chapters, readers may find that the focus shifts between these interpretive modalities. If those shifts are jarring, it is due, at least in part, to the tension inherent to the method I have employed and inherent to me as a reader; in other words, while my aesthetic sensibilities drive me to investigate the ability of literary art to produce beauty, my sensibilities as a citizen of the world compel me to attend to the role of literature as an ideological discourse. Perhaps even more to the point, in terms of the evolution of this project, aesthetic inquiry has led to political inquiry, and the results are for the reader to judge.

To move toward a conclusion, I'd like to offer an example of what I take to be the interleaving of politics and aesthetics. In November 2013, eleven years after the Prestige oil spill, one of the worst environmental disasters in Galician history, the Audiencia Provincial da Coruña absolved the individuals accused of “dano ao medio ambiente” and refused to impose monetary fines, in spite of the fact that the disaster cost the government some 500 million euros (Suárez n.pag.). After the verdict María Reimóndez tweeted, “Eles fixeron a desfeita, nós creamos dignidade dende as fendas e aí cómpre seguir” (“Eles fixeron” n.pag), a reference to the popular Nunca Máis movement that sprang up to protest the disaster and to the thousands of people from all over the world who volunteered in the clean-up effort. Reimóndez's words illustrate how an ethics of resistance is linked to a poetics of fissure; how individuals, through the exercise of their sense of justice and dignity, can use that which is broken in the world as a motor of creativity and activism. In a similar sense, Rábade Villar has identified cultural fracture lines as an important driving force in the realm of Galician literary production, arguing that “[a] multiplicación das fracturas na historia da cultura galega

moderna converteuse nunha fonte importante de enerxía cultural para todos aqueles escritores que fixeron da linguaxe da creba un lugar de resistencia” (54).

Though they differ one from the other in many respects, I propose that the novels studied here all participate in the poetics of fissure, from Ameixeiras’s “dous mundos que se odian porque se tocan” to Rivas’s rift between a town and its past, from Reimóndez’s cracked urban pavement to Borrazás’s space between literary and orality. One conclusion of this study, then, is that political and ideological fractures—and the attempts to repair them—are often rendered as spatial or geographical phenomena: movement, emplacement, uprooting, return, homemaking, mapping, and many others. Or, to put it a slightly different way, these novels use geography both as an aesthetic motif—an intraliterary phenomenon—and as thematic material that refers to the struggles in the world beyond the text.

One of the questions that emerges from this analysis concerns to what degree it is the task of literature—or literary criticism—to engage with and effect change in the world. Borrazás has written that “[i]ncapaz de afrontar directamente a realidade e conquistar o que desexan, moitos *amantes* da arte refúxianse nun universo de fantasmas que lles evitan ter que recorrer á acción” (*Arte e parte* 70). He goes on to criticize the frequent linkage between poetry and politics in Galician culture:

[u]n problema político expresado pola vía das palabras “fermosas” busca inconscientemente unha solución mítica, non só real. Os manifestos deberían lelos os mecánicos coas mans negras, as mariñeiras ulindo a sal, os empregados de banca, as xardineiras, os camareiros, as condutoras de autobús. (70)

For Rábade Villar, both literature and literary criticism are bound to reflect the fact that “a historia cultural se alía con frecuencia coa vontade de dominio, adopte este a forma de ocupación, colonialismo, imperialismo [...]” (*Fogar* 55). While she concedes that “[é] sempre

preferible a independencia na realidade que na literatura” (*Fogar* 56), Rábade Villar also contends that one task of the critic is to take into consideration the dynamics of domination and thence to “achegar as liñas de sentido que fan intelixible o xeito no que a periferia cultural—que non por acaso adoita coincidir coa periferia económica—respondeu á desigualdade histórica” (*Fogar* 56). On this view, “a literatura galega sempre foi un lugar de conflito, un territorio onde se libraron e aínda se libran batallas importantes sobre os termos nos que se debería definir ese país remoto que se chama Galicia” (*Fogar* 56).

If, as Miguel Torga says, “O universal é o local sem paredes,” the problems of historical inequality to which Rábade Villar refers are not merely Galician problems but universal ones. María Reimóndez, in her role as social activist, has long recognized this intersectionality, the moral requirement that consciousness of one struggle must lead to a consciousness of the interrelatedness of all struggles; Implicadas, an NGO of which Reimóndez is co-founder, uses this as a central operational principle in its work that connects socially conscious Galicians with the global south in an effort to understand and unravel the inequalities that structure our everyday lives. And while the creation and consumption of literature is perhaps not the most direct way of participating in this kind of political action, this dissertation has shown that by attending to literary representations of how space is lived, experienced, and contested, we can begin to radiograph the fractures that traverse our world, from the body to the globe, creating “dignidade dende as fendas.”



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